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Neurodivergence as Morphogenetic Non-Coincidence: Autism, AuDHD, and the Geometry of Masking

Timothy Speed

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Volume 21

Neurodivergence as Morphogenetic Non-Coincidence:
Autism, AuDHD, and the Geometry of Masking

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Abstract

The present volume develops the thesis that neurodivergent development cannot be adequately understood as long as research asks only which biological, neural, or cognitive elements differ. What may be decisive instead is that development changes the relational order within which the same elements can become effective at all. A gene can remain the same gene, a stimulus the same stimulus, a behaviour outwardly the same behaviour — and yet, within a differently formed developmental order, mean something different, be weighted differently, and enable different continuations.

What is meant by this, however, is not merely more complex causality. Displacement, distortion, and deformation are understood here not only as additional influences upon an otherwise unchanged development. Rather, form that has already emerged changes the relational conditions under which further differences can become effective. Development therefore not only leaves behind results, but changes the space of further development. Autism would then not necessarily be what causes a divergent development, nor an isolable object that arises at the end of this development. It could instead become visible as a boundary phenomenon of relational displacement.

The first contribution, **Autism as an Operatoric Boundary Phenomenon**, develops for this purpose a morphogenetic and operatoric model of autistic development. Different developmental orders can produce highly similar human forms without converging on the same internal developmental structure or the same world-relation. What is therefore decisive is not only that similar diagnostic surfaces can emerge from different generative structures. **The unity of this surface could itself partly arise only where differently formed world-relations encounter the same dominant Raster and become non-coincident in similar ways at its boundary.** Autism thus appears not primarily as a common internal object, but as a possible **operatoric boundary phenomenon**. From this perspective, monotropism, Double Empathy, incommensurability, and masking can be re-examined as different relational consequences of such non-coincidence.

The second contribution, **AuDHD as a Boundary Case of Non-Stabilizable Cognition**, extends this relational question to the level of scientific categories. AuDHD is not understood as another stable hybrid category, but as a boundary case at which it becomes visible that categorical models may become unstable precisely where they attempt to translate open relational dynamics into fixed diagnostic objects. The difficulty of classification is thus treated not only as a taxonomic problem, but as a possible finding concerning the limits of the underlying models of cognition and neurodivergence.

The third contribution, **Neurodivergence and the Geometry of Masking**, develops a **three-dimensional spatial field model of masking**. Masking is no longer understood primarily as a property, strategy, or burden of an individual person, but as a position within a relational field. The model distinguishes three dimensions: **structural distance or possible incommensurability, asymmetry of the necessary Compatibility Work, and operative viability or resonance**. As a result, outwardly similar forms of masking can

occupy different positions within the field and have different causes. The model thus opens the possibility of investigating masking not only through intensity or exhaustion, but through its **spatial-relational structure**.

Unmasking also changes its meaning within this model. A reduction in masking does not necessarily have to mean the uncovering of an original self beneath a social mask. It can equally arise from a change in the field geometry: expectations change, translation work is distributed differently, different temporal and relational conditions are permitted, normative Raster are opened. Unmasking can thereby be understood as a **Redistribution of Compatibility Work and Morphogenetic Pressure**.

Together, the three contributions develop a coherent research movement: differently formed developmental orders can enter into relational non-coincidence with one another; at scientific and diagnostic boundaries, this can become visible as categorical non-stabilizability, while in social fields it can generate Compatibility Work and Morphogenetic Pressure. The volume thereby connects developmental biology, autism theory, cognitive and diagnostic research, and relational social theory on a common level, without presupposing a homogeneous neurodivergent structure.

Its central research contribution therefore does not lie in a new definition of autism, AuDHD, or masking. It lies in the proposal to investigate three problems that have so far often been treated separately — **developmental heterogeneity, categorical instability, and the social distribution of compatibility work** — as different manifestations of a common relational problem.

Keywords: autism, autism theory, autism heterogeneity, autism ontology, autism subtyping, neurodivergence, AuDHD, ADHD, neurodevelopment, neurodevelopmental diversity, developmental systems theory, developmental cascades, heterochrony, canalization, developmental system drift, morphogenesis, bioelectric morphogenesis, developmental biology, enactivism, embodied cognition, predictive processing, monotropism, Double Empathy Problem, participatory sense-making, autistic masking, camouflaging, unmasking, masking theory, masking measurement, incommensurability, structural non-coincidence, morphogenetic non-coincidence, morphogenetic pressure, compatibility work, translation work, relational field theory, relevance orders, world-binding, Eigenzeit, non-closure, Seinsverschiebung, operatoric cognition, operatoric boundary phenomenon, relational ontology, cognitive pluralism, diagnostic categories, diagnostic boundaries, diagnostic misrecognition, philosophy of autism, philosophy of psychiatry, cognitive science, neurodiversity research, epistemic injustice, epistemic diversity, social legibility, normative cognition, raster theory, raster justice, neurotype matching, neurodivergent world-formation, neurodivergent epistemology, developmental trajectories, relational development, world-relation, autism and identity, autism and social interaction, autism diagnostics, neurodivergent communication, structural violence, Forced Neurotypical Identity Work, co-formation, ontological coexistence

Content

Neurodivergence as Morphogenetic Non-Coincidence: Autism, AuDHD, and the Geometry of Masking....1

Abstract....3

Neurodivergence as Morphogenetic Non-Coincidence: Autism, AuDHD, and the Geometry of Masking....9

Introduction....9

Autism as an Operatoric Boundary Phenomenon: *Eigenzeit, Non-Closure, and Morphogenetic Non-Coincidence*....14

Abstract....14

1. When Similar Bodies Do Not Mean the Same Development....16

2. What Developmental Research Already Sees — and What Is Still Missing....23

3. Seinsverschiebung: Development Changes Its Own Conditions....30

4. Morphogenetic Non-Coincidence: When Similar Development Does Not Produce the Same World....34

5. Where Incommensurability Arises: Operator, Relevance, and Embodied Binding....42

6. Monotropism as the Deepening of Relevance Paths....48

7. Double Empathy as an Encounter Phenomenon of Different Eigenzeiten....51

8. The Possible Fundamental Error: Autism as a Boundary Phenomenon of an Operatoric Order....52

References:....59

AuDHD as a Boundary Case of Non-Stabilizable Cognition On the Crisis of Categorical Models in Neurodivergence Research....63

Abstract:....63

1. Introduction....64

2. Critique of Existing Models....66

3. Theoretical Shift....67

4. AuDHD as a Liminal Boudary Case....69

5. Epistemic Function....72

6. Political Dimension....73

7. Conclusion....74

References:....75

Neurodivergence and the Geometry of Masking: A Three-Dimensional Field Model of Incommensurability, Morphogenetic Pressure, and Compatibility Work....77

Abstract....77

1. Introduction....79

2. From the Psychological to the Spatial Model of Masking....82

2.1 Structural Distance....84

2.2 Asymmetry of Compatibility Work....85
2.3 Operative Viability and Resonance....86
2.4 Masking as a Position in the Field....86
3. Not All Masking Is the Same: A Typology of Generators....87
3.1 Strategic Masking....88
3.2 Protective and Stigma-Induced Masking....88
3.3 Role-Related and Institutional Masking....89
3.4 Incommensurability-Induced Masking as a Theoretical Hypothesis....90
3.5 Overlaps Rather Than Rigid Categories....91
4. Why Exhaustion Does Not Define Masking....92
4.1 Intensity and Structure....93
4.2 Automation Does Not Eliminate the Field Relation....93
4.3 Masking Can Consume Energy — or Generate It....94
4.4 Burnout as an Endpoint, Not a Definition....95
4.5 Consequences for Measurement Instruments....96
5. Unmasking as a Field Shift Rather Than a Return to the "Authentic Self"....96
5.1 Relief Is Not the Same as Originality....97
5.2 The Problem of the Original....98
5.3 Unmasking as a Redistribution of Morphogenetic Pressure....99
5.4 The Paradoxical Possibility of a "Masking of Unmasking"....100
5.5 Autistic Self-Description Remains Epistemically Central....101
5.6 Authenticity as Viability....102
6. Neurodivergence as a Particular Field Position....103
6.1 Not One Difference, but Several at the Same Time....103
6.2 Field Depth Rather Than Mere Masking Intensity....104
6.3 The Hypothesis of Structural Incommensurability....105
6.4 Different Neurodivergent Profiles....106
6.5 The Dominant Raster Is Also a Field Position....107
6.6 Why Neurodivergent Masking Scores Can Be High....107
6.7 Neurodivergence as Making the Field Visible....108
7. The Three-Dimensional Masking Field....109
7.1 The Three Axes....109
7.2 No Linear Masking Scale....110
7.3 Positions Rather Than Categories....111
7.4 Movement Within the Field....112
7.5 Field Volume and Density....113

7.6 The Field Is Dynamic, Not Static....114
7.7 From the Person to the Field Signature....114
7.8 The Model as a Research Programme....115
8. Operationalisation and Empirical Testing of the Masking Field....116
8.1 Empirically Capturing Structural Distance....116
8.2 Incommensurability as a Testable Hypothesis....117
8.3 Measuring Asymmetry....118
8.4 Operative Viability....119
8.5 Operationalising Field Depth....119
8.6 Field Density and Field Persistence....120
8.7 From the Scale to the Field Map....122
8.8 A Possible Empirical Design....123
8.9 Falsifiability of the Model....124
8.10 From the Masking Score to the Geometry of Masking....124
9. Consequences for Neurodivergence Research and Diagnostics....125
9.1 Confusing Surface with Field Position....126
9.2 Masking as Competence Must Not Make Neurodivergence Invisible....127
9.3 Diagnostics Would Have to Become More Relational....127
9.4 The Environment as a Diagnostic Variable....128
9.5 The Danger of Diagnostic Burden as Proof....129
9.6 Unmasking Must Not Become a Diagnostic Counter-Standard....130
9.7 Masking Scales as Partial Measures Rather Than Total Models....131
9.8 A New Meaning of Diagnostic Contradictions....131
9.9 From a Deficit Profile to a Relational Profile....132
9.10 Consequences for Support and Therapy....133
9.11 Diagnostics as Observation of Morphogenetic Pressure....133
10. From Unmasking to Raster Justice: The Political Geometry of the Masking Field....134
10.1 Difference Does Not Yet Produce Violence....134
10.2 Raster Power....135
10.3 Neurodivergent Masking as Privatised Compatibility Work and Forced Neurotypical Identity Work....136
10.4 The Political Limit of Individual Unmasking....136
10.5 Raster Justice as a Change in Field Geometry....137
10.6 Not Equal Work, but Just Work....138
10.7 The Right to Low Legibility....138
10.8 From Accommodation to Co-Formation....139

10.9 Productive Difference....140
10.10 A Political Geometry Rather Than a Politics of the Self....141
11. Limits of the Model and Open Research Questions....142
11.1 Incommensurability Is Relational, Not Group-Essentialist....142
11.2 Neurodivergence Is Not a Homogeneous Field Position....144
11.3 The Axes Are Analytical, Not Necessarily Ontologically Independent....144
11.4 Field Depth, Field Density, and Persistence Are Not Yet Independent Basic Axes....145
11.5 The Difficulty of Measuring "Structural Distance"....145
11.6 Structural Distance Is Not Social Difficulty....146
11.7 Power Cannot Be Fully Geometrised....146
11.8 The Danger of a New Measurement of Neurodivergent People....147
11.9 The Model Must Not Replace Lived Experience....148
11.10 Culture and History of the Masking Field....148
11.11 Development and the Life Course....149
11.12 Masking as a Process Rather Than a State....149
11.13 A Research Programme Rather Than a Completed Theory....150
12. Conclusion: From the Psychology of the Mask to the Geometry of the Relation....151
12.1 From Masking Intensity to Masking Geometry....152
12.2 Why Neurodivergence Nevertheless Remains Particular....153
12.3 Exhaustion Is an Outcome, Not an Essence....153
12.4 The End of the Simple Masking/Unmasking Dichotomy....154
12.5 The Actual Counterpart to Harmful Masking....155
12.6 From Adaptation to Co-Formation and Ultimately to Ontological Coexistence....155
12.7 A Different Understanding of High Neurodivergent Masking Scores....156
12.8 The Possible Paradigm Shift....157
12.9 Closing Formula....157
References:....159

Neurodivergence as Morphogenetic Non-Coincidence:
Autism, AuDHD, and the Geometry of Masking

Introduction

Volume 21 opens a new phase of neurodivergence research within the *Operatoric Research Corpus*. While the earlier volumes of the series initially developed the ontological, epistemological, and social conditions of World-Binding, this volume returns to autism, AuDHD, and masking — now, however, with a substantially expanded theoretical and methodological architecture.

Section IV had already treated neurodivergence as an epistemic and ontological boundary domain. There, the possibility was explored that neurodivergent cognition does not merely represent a variation within a shared cognitive architecture, but may instead be connected to different operatoric forms of world-constitution. Volume 7 introduced concepts such as *autistic ontology* and *operatoric cognition*; Volume 8 examined the existential and institutional consequences of divergent World-Bindings through masking, diagnostic misrecognition, and Eigenzeit; Volume 9 extended this line into a theory of plural epistemic architectures.

These earlier works primarily asked **how neurodivergent world-relation might be structurally organised differently**. In doing so, they developed an alternative to purely deficit-based or functionalist models of autism and neurodivergence. What remained largely open at that point, however, was another question: How can such differences arise at all? Not merely in the sense of a linear causal chain of genes, neural processes, sensory particularities, or environmental factors, but as irreversible form-formation in which earlier stabilisation itself changes the conditions of later development.

It is precisely at this point that Volume 21 begins.

Between the earlier neurodivergence volumes and the present investigation, the theoretical framework of the Corpus was substantially expanded. In Volume 18, World-Binding was conceptualised as a general process of irreversible differentiation. Reality appears there not as a collection of already given objects, but as the result of stabilisations that never achieve complete closure. Every stabilisation binds difference, yet at the same time generates a remaining non-coincidence between realised form and non-neutralised openness. This difference appears as Gap, produces Eigenzeit, and changes the space of further emergence. Concepts such as negative topology, morphogenetic pressure, overlap, and operator formation were brought together there within a general theory of World-Formation.

This also changes the question of autism.

If development does not merely consist of states that follow one another within a constant possibility-space, but every realised form simultaneously changes which further relations are possible at all, then it is not sufficient to search for individual causes of a later phenotype. A genetic difference, a sensory process, or a particular form of neural organisation does not possess the same operatoric meaning independently of its developmental history. It becomes effective within an already formed relational order. The new autism paper in this volume develops from this idea the concept of **morphogenetic non-coincidence**. Different Eigenzeiten can produce macroscopically very similar human forms while nevertheless stabilising different relevance orders, Raster, and forms of operatoric continuability. Autism is thus not primarily understood as an object localisable within the individual, but as a possible operatoric boundary phenomenon in which different world-bindings fail to coincide in comparable ways under particular Raster conditions.

This shift is decisive because it does not simply presuppose the unity of the phenomenon. The fact that different people appear under the same diagnostic category "autism" does not have to mean that they share an identical internal structure. It may equally mean that different developmental trajectories become similarly visible at the same social, diagnostic, or epistemic boundary. The common object would then not necessarily be a hidden common cause behind all cases, but partly also the result of a shared Raster relation.

This does not mean rejecting genetic, neurological, or developmental-biological research. On the contrary: it remains indispensable. But its explanatory level is more precisely delimited. It can identify real conditions, partial processes, and recurring patterns without thereby already having to explain why these elements appear as a unified phenomenon. The distinction between a theory of developmental conditions and a theory of the unity of the diagnostic object thus becomes central.

At this point, AuDHD also acquires a new significance.

In the second text of this volume, AuDHD is not treated as a mere combination of two already stable categories. Precisely the difficulty of consistently determining AuDHD as "autism plus ADHD" or as an independent stable category is taken seriously as an epistemic finding. The question is not only how AuDHD can be classified more effectively, but whether the instability itself reveals something about the assumptions of categorical models of cognition. The paper proposes reading AuDHD as a boundary case of non-stabilisable cognition — not in the sense of individual dysfunction, but as an indication that cognition may in principle be more relational, more open, and less object-like than diagnostic classifications presuppose.

This creates a second level of non-coincidence within the volume. The first concerns development: different Eigenzeiten can produce different relational orders. The second concerns knowledge: scientific and diagnostic categories can capture these orders only under conditions of stabilisation. Where a phenomenon resists such stabilisation or oscillates between several categories, it is not only the phenomenon that becomes difficult; the epistemic architecture that seeks to determine it becomes visible.

The third text finally shifts this problem into the social field.

Masking has so far been described in research primarily as a psychological or behavioural phenomenon: as adaptation, camouflaging, compensation, impression management, or a response to stigmatisation. The field model developed in this volume asks differently. It does not primarily investigate **how strongly** a person masks, but **within what relational space masking becomes necessary**. Structural distance between relevance orders, the asymmetry of translation work, and operative viability within the field become decisive. Masking thereby appears as Compatibility Work between partially non-coincident World-Bindings.

This shift also prevents a problematic equation of different forms of masking. Strategic, stigma-induced, role-related, and possibly incommensurability-induced masking can appear similar at the surface while nevertheless possessing different generative structures. Exhaustion is likewise not treated as a defining property of masking, but as a possible consequence of particular field constellations. Unmasking, in turn, need not mean that an original "authentic self" is uncovered beneath a social mask. It can also mean a change in the field: expectations shift, translation work is distributed differently, Eigenzeiten are permitted, normative Raster open up.

The volume thus connects three levels that are often investigated separately: biological development, epistemic categorisation, and social interaction.

Its central movement is:

Form-formation → non-coincidence → categorical stabilisation → compatibility work.

This movement is also the point at which Volume 21 directly connects to *World-Formation Research*.

World-Formation Research assumes that scientific knowledge does not merely describe reality, but through distinction, naming, modelling, and stabilisation itself produces world-forms. Science must close in order to know and act. Yet it must also investigate how its own closures change the conditions of further knowledge. This second movement is understood not as a subsequent ethics, but as a component of scientific rationality itself.

For neurodivergence research, this has far-reaching consequences. If the question is asked less in terms of what autism is, and instead under what conditions something becomes visible as autism, then the question of the traits a person possesses also changes. So does the question of **which differences are highlighted by the diagnostic Raster, which are neutralised, and which are first produced as deviation through this Raster**.

The central question is not only why the person masks. Equally important becomes: Which relational orders encounter one another, how great is their non-coincidence, and who carries the work of their social compatibilisation?

Neurodivergence thereby becomes both the object and a methodological boundary case of World-Formation Research. It makes it possible to observe how scientific, clinical, and social orders deal with difference that cannot be completely translated into their own categories.

The volume does not, however, propose a homogeneous "autistic ontology". The idea of structural non-coincidence must not turn into a new essentialisation. Neither autism nor ADHD nor AuDHD is presupposed as a uniform operatoric form. Incommensurability likewise does not designate a universal property of neurodivergent existence. It is understood relationally: as the possible degree to which particular World-Bindings cannot be translated into one another without loss under concrete conditions.

It is precisely here that the significance of the concept of **morphogenetic non-coincidence** lies. It does not designate a new diagnostic entity. It designates a research problem.

How can developmental processes that share large parts of the same biological, material, and social world nevertheless produce different geometries of relevance, continuability, and World-Binding? How can these differences remain invisible for long periods and become apparent only at particular transitions — social expectations, diagnostic situations, institutional demands, or forms of communication — as non-fit? And why should shared visibility at such boundaries automatically lead to the inference of a uniform internal cause?

These questions deliberately lead the volume to the boundaries of different research fields. Developmental biology, Autism Research, Cognitive Science, Enactivism, Neurodiversity Studies, Philosophy of Psychiatry, Masking Research, and relational social theory are not merged into a single metatheory. Rather, their respective explanatory capacities are shifted against one another in order to make visible where a state-based theory is insufficient and a theory of relation becomes necessary.

In this sense, Volume 21 continues the movement of the Corpus as a whole. The earlier neurodivergence volumes developed from autism and neurodivergent perception questions concerning alternative epistemic architectures. Volume 18 generalised these questions into a theory of Difference, Eigenzeit, and World-Binding. Volume 19 developed this into an explicit research programme: World-Formation Research that investigates not only forms, but also the conditions of their stabilisation and the consequences of scientific closure. Volume 21 now returns this general theory to the field from which a significant part of its epistemic irritation originally emerged.

This return, however, is not a repetition.

The earlier question was primarily whether neurodivergent people bind the world differently.

The question of this volume goes deeper:

How can different forms of World-Binding arise at all, how does it become a diagnostically legible boundary phenomenon, and what happens socially when several such orders do not fully coincide with one another?

Volume 21 thereby also forms the theoretical starting point for the subsequent volumes of this Section, many of which address the consequences of violence. But non-coincidence alone is not violence. Different World-Bindings can coexist, partially translate one another, transform one another, and generate new forms. Violence arises only where one order asymmetrically imposes its own Raster structure, shifts the necessary compatibility work onto others, pathologises difference, or binds protection and recognition to successful translation into dominant categories.

The later investigations of diagnostic power, ABA and Forced Neurotypical Identity Work, the welfare state, institutional violence, and structural responsibility begin precisely at this transition.

Volume 21 therefore does not yet primarily investigate violence. It investigates **the difference from whose asymmetric treatment violence can emerge**.

Autism as an Operatoric Boundary Phenomenon: *Eigenzeit, Non-Closure, and Morphogenetic Non-Coincidence*

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Abstract

This paper develops a morphogenetic and operatoric model of autistic development. Its starting point is a problem in current explanations of autism: genetic, neural, sensory, and developmental research can determine with increasing precision **which components and differences are involved in autistic development**, without thereby necessarily explaining why these differences appear together as "autism," or why similar biological elements can become effective in different ways within different people.

The paper therefore proposes investigating autism not only at the level of individual components or causal factors, but at the level of their **form and relation**. Morphology here does not merely refer to bodily form. What is meant is the question of how an already formed structure changes which further relations, effects, and continuations are possible at all. The same gene, the same stimulus, or the same representational structure can remain materially identical and nevertheless occupy a different operatoric position within a relational order that has formed differently.

With the concepts of Gap, Nicht-Schließbarkeit (*Non-Closure*), Seinsverschiebung (*Shift of being*), and Eigenzeit, this displacement is given a theoretical formulation. Development is not understood merely as a sequence of causally connected states. Every realized form binds difference without fully abolishing it and thereby implies a changed relational order. **Eigenzeit denotes the irreversible curvature of this world-binding.**

Operatoric here means: what matters is not only which components are present or which processes take place between them, but what position a difference occupies within a given relational order with regard to possible continuations. What is meant is not an additional process stage, but a form of connectability, relevance, and efficacy implied by the respective order itself.

On this basis, the concept of **morphogenetic non-coincidence** is developed. Different Eigenzeiten can produce macroscopically highly similar human forms and share large parts of the same material, linguistic, and social world without therefore converging on the same internal structure or the same world-relation. They can stabilize different orders of

relevance, Raster, and forms of operatoric continuability. Their apparent commonality therefore need not lie within these Eigenzeiten themselves. It may arise only where different world-relations encounter the same dominant Raster and become non-coincident in similar ways at its boundary of closure.

From this follows the central research contribution of the paper: autism is modelled not primarily as an object localizable within the individual, as a common end-structure of different causes, or as a merely heterogeneous phenotype, but as a possible **operatoric boundary phenomenon**. The relevant difference may lie less in isolable components than in a displaced relational geometry within which the same components can mean, weight, or continue differently. The dominant Raster does not merely read this difference in a retrospectively distorted way. By rendering certain differences comparable, excluding others, and closing different Eigenzeit-curvatures under a common representation, it participates in determining which forms become visible as "autism" at all.

This also shifts the ontological question. The common surface of autistic traits need not merely be an incomplete representation of a deeper common essence. It could itself be partly the product of a Raster-relation. Different Eigenzeiten can appear similar at the same boundary of closure even though they do not share an identical internal structure. The boundary phenomenon would then be real, but not the relational forms of world-binding that become visible at it.

This perspective reorders monotropism, Double Empathy, incommensurability, and masking as relational consequences of different forms of operatoric continuability. Monotropism can be understood as differing operative depth of relevance paths, incommensurability as the boundary of lossless translatability between world-relations, and masking as compatibility work between operatorics that do not fully coincide.

At the same time, the model shifts the methodological question of autism research. Diagnostic traits and biological markers can capture real substructures, conditions, or recurring forms of the boundary phenomenon without therefore necessarily determining the ontological status of what is called autism. The diagnostic boundary shows that non-coincidence exists; it does not, however, contain the relational geometry whose non-coincidence becomes visible there. Research may therefore be searching for a common object where the unity of the phenomenon may only be produced and become visible at a particular boundary.

Keywords: autism, neurodivergence, autism heterogeneity, autism ontology, morphogenesis, Seinsverschiebung, Eigenzeit, morphogenetic non-coincidence, world-binding, operatorics, relevance weighting, Raster, developmental trajectories, developmental cascades, developmental systems theory, heterochrony, equifinality, Morphogenetic Pressure, incommensurability, monotropism, Double Empathy, participatory sense-making, enactivism, masking, camouflaging, biomarkers, autism subtyping, diagnostic boundaries, autism theory

1. When Similar Bodies Do Not Mean the Same Development

Autism research has faced a peculiar problem for decades. On the one hand, autism is regarded as a neurodevelopmental form of human variation in which biological foundations play a central role. On the other hand, despite substantial advances in genetics, neuroscience, and developmental research, it has not been possible to determine a single cause or unified mechanism from which the diversity of autistic development could convincingly be derived. Instead, research finds a large number of genetic variants, different developmental trajectories, sensory particularities, differences in connectivity, attention, and motor function, as well as considerable heterogeneity among autistic people.

Usually, this diversity is treated as a difficulty that has so far obscured a causal explanation that is assumed to exist in principle. The more data become available, so the hope goes, the more precisely it should eventually be possible to determine which genetic, neural, or developmental factors produce the later autistic phenotype.

The present paper begins at a different point.

It shifts the central question from genetic causation to the morphology of development.

This could be particularly fruitful in the case of neurodivergence.

But this is something different from merely saying that autism has many causes. The level of morphology makes it possible to understand autism much more as a phenomenon of form-formation than as signal transmission or purely genetic disposition. Genes thereby become part of a level that itself follows other rules that are also operative. For example, the phenomena of distortion and deformation, as well as negative topology. This is a spatial understanding, rather than searching for autism only at the level of information transmission or biochemistry.

This does not dispute the significance of genetic research. Genes are real developmental conditions. But the question is no longer first which genetic changes cause a particular later state. Rather, the question becomes how biological form arises at all, how earlier form-formation constrains later form-formation, and how different developmental histories can lead, despite extensive outward similarity, to different forms of perception, relevance, and world-binding.

Form-formation does not concern only the material shaping of objects, but also has an operatoric, prior level in which forms result from conditions that in turn alter conditions.

The reason for this shift is simple, but consequential:

> **Genes do not act upon a neutral organism. They always act within a development that has already taken place, that is, within an already formed relational order of form. Every further effect therefore encounters a space whose relations have already been displaced by preceding form-formation. If one assumes, as will be developed further**

here, that every form means a distortion of its own potential that acts into the total space of relations, the level of cause and effect shifts.

The model therefore does not deny genetic causes. It asks why the same genetic difference need not possess the same meaning independently of the relational order that has already formed.

A bird can fly through the air. Fatigue is a linear causality that influences the further sequence of form, as do weather or air pressure, but independently of this, a bird will never fly the same route identically. This is not due to environmental influences, not to statistics, but to deeper morphological rules.

Even if all controllable external conditions were ideally held equal, the second movement would not simply be a repetition of the first. For with the first realized movement, not only has an event occurred. The relational order within which a further movement can become effective has itself already shifted.

A Setzung cannot be returned identically to itself within an organic system. This deformation will later be explained as Seinsverschiebung (*Shift of being*) and provides another level for considering distortion. The bird looks like a bird and flies like a bird, but it is always a displacement of itself.

Even complete knowledge of genetic involvement would not resolve the question of where the distorting relation between openness, possibility-space, and concrete form comes from and how it operates within an organism. One could create a genetic copy of the bird and it would still not fly identically. In the first case, because the weather is different; in the second, because it cannot identically repeat itself.

It is precisely this level of distortion that is applied here to autism, in order to investigate whether the perception of many autistic people that they stand in displaced relations does not take place on another level than the purely bodily one, at the level of genes, nerves, or the brain.

The level of genes could show which biological differences participate in a development, but cannot by itself determine what operatoric meaning such a difference acquires within an already historically formed world-binding. Still less would it follow from this that different people who are later brought together under the same diagnostic category of autism possess the same internal history of form.

Genetics can therefore identify conditions of development without thereby necessarily explaining the unity of the diagnostic object. It is precisely at this second question that the present model begins: Why can different biological and morphogenetic histories appear similar at the same Raster (grid)-boundary (boundary of transferability within different deformations) — and why is a common object subsequently inferred from this shared visibility?

The additional theory is therefore not needed because genes are unimportant, but because genetic explanation and the explanation of the unity of the phenomenon are two different problems.

The same genetic, sensory, or regulatory event therefore does not possess the same meaning at every point in time. It encounters an organism whose previous form-formation has already determined which responses are possible, probable, or still reachable at all.

The direction of view could therefore perhaps be extended from the causal chain of things that act upon one another toward a phenomenon showing that organisms and systems do not develop only in causal chains, but in deformations and displacements within particular Raster-relations, upon which they are in turn represented differently.

One can break the image of an apple into small pixels. But the apple could also be assembled from larger or still smaller pixels, as well as through entirely different Raster. How the apple is rasterized, however, massively changes causal chains. The apple would repeatedly remain visible, but the segment from which something follows, or at whose boundary an overlap of patterns becomes recognizable, leads to a differently structured solution path each time. And precisely this path, which in a sense continuously curves anew, could carry within it the actual phenomenon of autism and neurodivergence, rather than any single detail.

For this reason, the morphological level of analysis — that is, the level of deformation and displacement at particular points — is more powerful than that of genes. It does not so much need to explain how something foreign (deficit) takes place within the "normal," but instead focuses on phenomena of distortion and deformation that result much earlier, or at a more underlying level, from form-formation itself. That is, from the circumstance of Non-Closure, which will be developed further here: forms can never completely coincide with the possibility-space from which they emerge. This is not a causal displacement produced by other influences, but one arising from its own internal logic.

Biology is not a machine. Nor is it arbitrary. Its relation to itself is shaped by self-deformation, not only by linear intention. This self-deformation can come into conflict with linear intention in such a way that the deformation is read as an error and thereby produces an alienation from itself. Autism could be a consequence of these boundary phenomena. It is one thing whether a gene is influenced by other chemistry or signals, and quite another when a linear sequence encounters its own deformation and relations then fail to fulfil themselves in the intended way, while an effect upon itself implies a displacement.

This is precisely where the present model differs from an ordinary causal developmental chain.

A classical causal chain can be highly complex. An early factor influences a second, this changes a third, and from many such interactions a phenotype finally emerges. Developmental-cascade models have rightly shown that such interactions can connect multiple developmental domains over long periods of time (Bradshaw et al., 2022; Russo et al., 2026).

The theory of Seinsverschiebung (*Shift of being*), in the author's work, however, claims something different and perhaps more relevant here.

> **A Seinsverschiebung (*Shift of being*) is not another stage within a causal chain. It changes the conditions of causality itself. For causality cannot remain identical in relation to itself. This is something different from its changing through the addition of new events.**

After a Seinsverschiebung, the next developmental step no longer takes place within the same possibility-space as before. The apple must become an apple by another path.

The apple remains reachable within certain possibilities of form, but not because its form was stored in the Raster. Rather, development already undergone has produced conditions under which certain further forms remain reachable while others are excluded. For deformation changes relation. Relation weakens or strengthens effect. Effect is not only a question of dose, but also a question of non-repeatability, that is, of Non-Closure. Effect can never be identical effect. A coarser Raster may make it appear so, but effect in enactment is never identical with itself.

There are therefore two levels. Nothing can be repeated identically. And a Raster that is too coarse conceals precisely this difference.

This in turn produces a new difference that, as deformation, can have an experiential form, and this experience could be closer to that of autism than has previously been assumed.

The apple remains recognizable as an apple. But depending on which differences the Raster can resolve at all, different patterns, transitions, and further possibilities of form connect to the same visible form. These then drift away from the actual experience of non-repeatability and increasingly form incommensurable experience.

That is the decisive difference.

If A leads to B and B to C, classical causal logic retains, at least in principle, the idea that development can be reconstructed backwards: from C to B, from B to A. The more precise the measurement, the closer one should come to the origin.

With a Seinsverschiebung, this backward movement works only to a limited extent. For B is not merely a result of A. With B, what C could become has changed at the same time. The transition therefore does not merely leave a trace in the organism. It changes the space of later possibilities.

The Seinsverschiebung deforms the possibility-space. Within this deformation, Raster arise through which certain patterns become visible while others are no longer readable, or only readable in altered form. One cannot simply move from the coarse pixel to the small pixel without losing information about form, or, more precisely, potential has been factically restricted.

The underlying image is therefore not a row of dominoes.

It is more like a path in which **each step changes the terrain both behind and in front of the person walking**.

One can later determine where someone stands. One can reconstruct earlier steps. But one cannot simply walk the path backwards, because the terrain through which those earlier steps passed no longer exists in that form.

In *Morphology Without Memory*, precisely this structure is described as negative topology. Past form-formation is not preserved like stored information. It remains effective as an irreversibly altered condition of further form-formation. Irreversible because it cannot be repeated identically. What has been lost does not remain unchanged somewhere behind the present form, waiting to be restored. New form can arise only under the conditions that have meanwhile changed (Speed, 2026e). It can move only forward and not backward. Organisms therefore do not develop as copy-paste, but out of increasingly determined possibility-spaces. Later sequences of form are not predetermined within them. They are simply no longer possible under the same conditions as before.

An apple cannot become a car, but neither can it become the same apple again.

This point is central to the question of autism.

For the traditional search for causes often implicitly presupposes that the present organism can, as it were, be disassembled backwards. If the autistic trait can be identified, then it should also be possible to find the change that produced this trait. In this way, development is conceived as a sequence of reconstructible causes.

Eigenzeit, an important concept in the author's research, further challenges this assumption.

Eigenzeit here denotes neither a subjective perception of time nor an alternative biological clock. It denotes the irreversible developmental reality of a system: the fact that every form-formation allows later form-formation to take place under already altered conditions. Time is therefore not merely the distance between events. It appears as **inscribed irreversibility**.

Forward: Non-Closure. Backward: non-repeatability. This produces a different Morphogenetic Pressure than at the level of genes and neurology.

This also shifts the relation between genetics and morphology.

Genetics rightly asks which variants influence developmental processes. A morphogenetic perspective additionally asks what becomes of such influences when they become effective at different times, within different already formed forms, and under different conditions of coupling.

The focus therefore does not shift away from genes because genes are unimportant.

It shifts because genes **alone are not a developmental history**. Autism may be less a question of isolable triggers than a question of differently curved Eigenzeiten (deformation, displacement) that become similarly visible at particular Raster-boundaries.

Michael Levin's work on bioelectric morphogenesis is relevant precisely for this reason. It shows that biological form cannot adequately be understood as the linear implementation of a genetic blueprint. Cell collectives coordinate growth, regeneration, and anatomical organization through distributed regulatory processes that respond to deviations and can actively stabilize form (Levin et al., 2017).

Canalization and Developmental System Drift likewise show why looking at finished form can be misleading. Developmental processes can buffer different internal conditions and nevertheless produce similar outward phenotypes. Conversely, homologous outward forms can rest upon different regulatory developmental architectures (Siegal & Bergman, 2002; McColgan & DiFrisco, 2024).

This makes an assumption problematic that is deeply embedded in diagnostic and scientific thinking about autism:

> If a largely ordinary human body has emerged at the end, then the greater part of its internal development must also have proceeded ordinarily.

That does not follow.

An organism can remain macroscopically highly self-similar and nevertheless carry a different history of relational form-formation. The deformation does not change the categories of forms, but their relation in space and time.

The outward form can converge while Eigenzeit diverges.

This is the point at which autism becomes biologically readable in another way.

Not as an "addition" within an otherwise identical human being. Not as a local defect sitting somewhere within an otherwise largely normal system. But possibly as a family of developmental trajectories whose differences are distributed across long periods of form-formation and therefore need not be discoverable in the finished organism as a clearly bounded object.

It would be an implied boundary phenomenon and not "different paths" of the same phenomenon.

The term **Morphogenetic Pressure** used here denotes the operative tension under which a system must respond to existing difference with further form-formation. This response produces a new form. The new form does not, however, replace development. It itself becomes the condition of the next step. As already stated, it can neither fully realize itself in the sense of effect nor be reversibly repeated.

Precisely for this reason, the question of a single original cause may be misleading. That is, the search for a deficit that produces a displacement toward autism, if the phenomenon of displacement already lies at an entirely different level and its stabilization could also be explained through boundary phenomena and problems of Raster-transfer between forms.

The further development has proceeded, the less the early trigger continues to exist as an isolable explanation of the later whole. Its effect has entered into subsequent form-formations, has been amplified, weakened, redirected, or qualitatively altered by them. Development therefore has no simple backward direction.

This is not a claim that causes do not exist. But it raises the question whether the cause may not lie at the beginning, but in rules of form-formation themselves. Cause would not lie in a Before in which something develops into autism, but in the rupture point at which a dominant Raster treats form as though it were repeatable in its effects and thus becomes incapable of representing the actual difference. This would then be a stabilized displacement. It would not be the consequence of a development, but the consequence of non-transferability. The problem would lie less in something happening within autistic people than in the effect of a Raster that closes too strongly to integrate the consequences of Non-Closure.

Cause would shift. Away from the deficit in the autistic person and toward a rupture of transferability co-produced by the dominant Raster.

A foreigner can be unintelligible at a national border in two respects. First, because they speak another language. Second, because it is assumed that they must speak the same language as the people in the country. Who, then, produces the unintelligible foreigner? The foreigner themselves, or the people who presuppose only one language?

The problem therefore already lies in the idea that the cause must lie at a particular point. Within an Eigenzeit, causality can be described through curved relations, which incorporates cause as temporal sequence but does not make it the only level on which deviation can occur.

The point is the recognition that **causality changes its form within an Eigenzeit**.

And from this follows the actual research question of this paper:

> How can small differences in biological form-formation, through irreversible Seinsverschiebungen (*Shifts of being*), bring forth relational orders in which the same material or representational elements occupy different operatoric positions, and how can such different Eigenzeiten at later Raster-boundaries not only become readable as similar autistic boundary phenomena, but arise there in the first place?

Only from here does the original question underlying this paper become comprehensible: Why can an autistic person share the same material and linguistic world in many domains and nevertheless fail, at decisive points, to “dock” self-evidently into the neurotypically stabilized world-order?

The answer is not sought here in a missing social module. It is sought first in the possibility that two highly similar human organisms can form **different genealogical curvatures of the same open world**.

This is not a difference of interpretation alone.

It would be a difference of formation.

Put simply: The same element can be materially identical in two developmental worlds and nevertheless do something different because the relations in which it stands have become different. It is precisely this difference that is referred to in what follows as operatoric.

The same thing can remain the same and nevertheless do something different because the relations in which it becomes effective have changed. Because effect does not fall back identically upon itself.

Autism could become visible as a common boundary phenomenon partly where different relational worlds become non-coincident in similar ways at the same social or diagnostic boundary.

2. What Developmental Research Already Sees — and What Is Still Missing

The shift from the search for causes to the morphology of development does not begin in a vacuum. In several areas of recent developmental biology and autism theory, it is already becoming apparent that linear models are reaching their limits. Small early differences can intensify over long periods of time, developmental domains can influence one another, similar phenotypes can arise through different regulatory pathways, and temporal shifts can have consequences that only much later become visible as stable traits.

Part of the problem has therefore already been described. What has not yet been sufficiently clarified, however, is **what becomes of a development when earlier form-formation does not merely influence later states, but changes the space of later possibilities itself, because something cannot remain what it is**.

It is one thing to regard this as the natural course of things, and quite another to see the deformation that does not arise through an external influence, but from Non-Closure itself, which can subsequently appear as an altered condition of further effect.

Initially, however, deformation is a consequence of its own non-repeatability, but can be mistaken for an environmental influence. Such influences also exist, but we are speaking here of another phenomenon.

Developmental-cascade models are an important starting point here. They move away from the idea that a single early trait simply reappears later in enlarged form. Development is instead understood as a network of reciprocal effects in which changes in one domain influence other domains and thereby generate new developmental conditions. Bradshaw et al. accordingly describe autism as the result of cumulative and bidirectional processes between biological systems, behaviour, and experience (Bradshaw et al., 2022).

This, however, is precisely where an important difference from the present model lies. Developmental-cascade models describe how already existing differences, states, and influences alter further developmental conditions. A sensory difference,

for example, changes experience; altered experience in turn acts back upon attention, learning, or social development. The change thus initially appears as a consequence of interactions between distinguishable factors.

The deformation meant here begins at another point. It does not first have to be produced by an additional external influence. It already arises from the fact that a realized form, under conditions of Non-Closure, cannot fall back completely identically upon its own conditions. Form is therefore not neutral in its repetition. Every realization shifts the relational order within which further effect becomes possible. The deformation implied by the non-repeatability of a posited form already belongs to the altered conditions of further form-formation and can appear at the level of subsequent processes like an additional influence.

The two phenomena can therefore easily become empirically entangled. Environment, experience, biological regulation, or social interaction obviously act upon development. The Seinsverschiebung (*Shift of being*) described here, however, designates something else: not the addition of another influence upon an otherwise unchanged system, but the deformation of the conditions of efficacy that already follows from the fact that form cannot repeat itself identically and cannot fully close. This deformation is therefore not only a later influence, but already belongs to the relational order within which further development becomes effective.

Russo et al. carry this other thought of merely external effect further for sensory development. They propose reading early sensory differences not only as later accompanying manifestations of an autism already present, but as possible starting points of further developmental cascades. Sensory development is already well advanced in the first year of life and forms a basis for later social, linguistic, and cognitive processes. Early differences could therefore produce downstream effects on attention, learning, language, and social communication without an already fully developed autistic phenotype being inferable from them (Russo et al., 2026).

This also marks another important shift. The later phenotype need not already be contained in the early deviation. A sensory difference is not simply a small autism that later becomes larger. Rather, it changes the conditions under which further development takes place.

Research on heterochrony also points in this direction. Crespi has proposed understanding certain autistic traits as possible consequences of altered developmental rates and developmental timings. What would then matter is not only which processes are present, but when they occur in relation to other developmental processes (Crespi, 2013).

This thought is particularly relevant to the present model because the same biological components need not produce the same result if their temporal relation to one another is altered.

But this is not the same as Non-Closure. It is a historicization of effective influences.

A process that begins earlier encounters a different developmental environment than the same process at a later point in time. A sensory system that stabilizes under different conditions in turn changes the experiences available for further development. A shift in timing can therefore extend beyond its local effect.

Heterochrony thus already describes **that time itself is developmentally effective**. The question is why. On the one hand certainly because of external influences, on the other because something cannot be returned identically to itself. That is a substantial difference. For even if the external influences were filtered out, the second aspect would remain.

Individual effective factors could under certain circumstances be altered pharmacologically or regulatorily; the Seinsverschiebung itself would not thereby be abolished.

The theory of Seinsverschiebung therefore asks not only which later states are altered, but **which altered conditions of efficacy are already implied with a Setzung itself**.

By **condition**, what is meant here is not simply an external influence or an additional prerequisite. What is meant is that relational level upon which a form encounters itself when it is to be returned to itself. It is precisely there that Non-Closure appears: a posited form cannot become completely identical with itself again.

The condition of further form therefore lies, paradoxically, precisely in the fact that complete return to itself is impossible. Not only has the historical location in space and time become different; **the relation within which something could become effective again as the same thing has already shifted**.

This non-identity is not a subsequent disturbance of an otherwise closed process. It is already implied with the posited form. **From this difference arise deformation and Morphogenetic Pressure as consequences of a Non-Closure that demands further form.**

Canalization is also important for this question. Developmental processes can partially buffer genetic and environmental variation, so that comparatively stable phenotypes arise despite different internal conditions. Siegal and Bergman show that such robustness can arise from the structure of regulatory networks themselves (Siegal & Bergman, 2002).

For autism theory, this has a far-reaching consequence:

> **Outward similarity can do more than overlook developmental differences. It can conceal them.**

But this concerns external circumstances. It nevertheless also shows that arbitrariness has a limit.

A human body has strong morphological constraints. Development is not arbitrarily open. Many developmental differences therefore need not end in fundamentally different bodily forms. They can remain within the same broad human morphology and instead express themselves in finer forms of organization: in sensory weighting, neural connectivity,

attentional binding, coordination, temporal coupling, or later in structures of relevance and world-binding.

A deformation may therefore become visible here or may not, but this still does not touch the level being discussed here.

Developmental System Drift sharpens this point once more. The term designates cases in which homologous traits are phenotypically preserved even though the genetic and regulatory mechanisms contributing to their formation differ substantially. Phenotypic similarity therefore does not without further qualification permit the inference of an identical or conserved developmental architecture (McColgan & DiFrisco, 2024).

This makes it describable how such heterogeneous diversity of autism profiles can arise, which then appear similar within the outer bracket, and this probably also plays a role. But the question is what it does not explain. It explains mutations and developmental changes, but not how deformation or displacement can take place without causal temporal sequences. It does not explain why deformation is a fundamental condition of form-formation itself. That is, a condition.

It therefore stands at the beginning, or defined without time, it is already implied without being a process. The deformation being discussed here is not the consequence of a process, but a consequence and requirement of form-formation itself. Form-formation means distortion, not always in relation to what came before, but in relation to the representation and stabilized form of the self. Form-formation is always a displacement of its own point of focus. Yet this blur is usually not read in the thing itself, but at the problems of connection and incommensurabilities at edges and boundaries. One could say that the world therefore never closes. It cannot be closed through forms.

For autism, Developmental System Drift is not an immediate explanatory model. It does, however, provide an important biological counterargument to a deeply rooted intuition:

> **What appears phenotypically similar need not have been brought forth by the same developmental architecture. Just as the world is not in fact the sum of its parts. It is conceivable that the world is only a fantasy of delimitation against the perception of too many differences. World-Binding requires difference, but stabilizes itself through its subsequent reduction. This produces boundaries at which other forms appear as disturbances of this intention.**

It is precisely at this point that Michael Levin's work on morphogenesis becomes interesting. Levin's research shows that biological form cannot adequately be understood as the direct implementation of genetic information. Cell collectives coordinate growth, regeneration, and anatomical organization through distributed bioelectric and regulatory processes. Morphological stability thus additionally rests upon dynamic form regulation and not upon genetic specification alone (Levin et al., 2017).

This does not mean that genes are secondary. It means that **genetics alone is not yet a theory of form-formation**. It is only one side, that of Setzung, but not that of the boundary phenomena associated with such a Setzung.

The present paper begins precisely at this boundary.

Levin's work is therefore connectable because it makes biological form readable as a regulatory and distributed occurrence. In *Morphology Without Memory*, however, the starting point is different: there, the idea is problematized that form could, in a strong sense, be conceived as a stored, retrievable, or reconstructible target state. Past form-formation, according to this argument, does not lie available as an unchanged template. What continues to operate are the conditions of further form-formation that have meanwhile changed, that is, the boundary regions of non-fit (Speed, 2026e).

The difference is essential.

A morphogenetic system can be highly stable in change without thereby returning to an original state. Under altered conditions, it can once again produce a similar form. Similarity would then not be evidence of restoration, but an expression of a system's capacity **to produce new self-similarity under new conditions**.

Self-similarity here results from the increasing density of potential reduction that accompanies every Seinsverschiebung. Every completed form-formation excludes possibilities and thereby increases the conditionality of subsequent form-formation without completely determining its concrete form.

Form thereby no longer appears as a static target, but as a temporally bound success of stabilization. The question is therefore again not whether autism is a consequence of something having gone wrong in form-formation, but rather what happens at the boundaries of form-formation to differences that cannot be integrated into the new stabilization.

And it is precisely here that the relation between morphology and Eigenzeit becomes visible.

Every stabilization solves a concrete problem of form-formation. At the same time, it constrains further possibilities. What has once arisen becomes the condition of what can arise next. In *The Negative Movement of Eigenzeit*, Morphogenetic Pressure is accordingly understood not as external pressure, but as the operative consequence of a difference that can neither be completely dissolved nor completely separated (Speed, 2026f).

Developmental biology can thereby be read differently.

Genes, bioelectric states, sensory inputs, mechanical conditions, metabolism, experience, and social coupling do not form a list of competing individual causes. They are different conditions that become effective within an already existing history of form.

This history of form is itself not neutral. It co-determines what a new influence can bring about at the relational level. Deformation takes place independently of the histories of change of individual processes.

This can also be seen in much earlier concepts in biology.

Jakob von Uexküll's theory of Umwelt already showed that organisms do not simply operate in an identical, neutrally given world. What appears as relevant environment arises from the specific coupling of perception and action. The same material space can therefore form different operative worlds for different organisms.

Uexküll pluralizes the environment; Seinsverschiebung shifts the question once again. What matters is not only that different organisms form different environments, but that **every posited form already implies a relational order within which further differences acquire a particular operatoric position**.

Here lies the actual distance from Developmental Cascades, Heterochrony, or classical dynamic developmental models. These approaches show that development is complex, time-dependent, and recursive. The theory of Seinsverschiebung adds a different claim: **Real form-formation does not merely change states within an existing order. With the Setzung of a form, an altered relational order is already implied within which further effect first acquires its position.**

It therefore does not simply produce a longer causal chain.

Causal processes remain real and can be reconstructed. Genes, nerves, substances, functions, experiences, or environmental conditions can influence a trajectory of form. Alongside this, however, lies another level: form cannot return completely identically to itself. With every Setzung, therefore, not only is something within the world changed; at the same time, the relational order within which further differences become connectable is displaced.

One could therefore distinguish between an **external order of development** and an **operatoric order of form-formation**. The external order describes how concrete factors act upon one another and shape developmental trajectories. The operatoric order, by contrast, designates the relational displacement implied by the Setzung itself, by virtue of which the same factors do not necessarily possess the same position within another Eigenzeit.

These two levels must not be dissolved into one another.

This does not mean that past events would be fundamentally unreconstructible scientifically. Developmental conditions, genetic variants, material changes, or historical sequences can in part be reconstructed with great precision. The reconstruction of a material or causal history, however, is not identical with renewed access to its Eigenzeit, that is, to that irreversible relational curvature within which this history became effective at all.

Eigenzeit does not lie present as a stored sequence of past states. It denotes the irreversible curvature given with actual world-binding. One can therefore describe, model, or under certain circumstances even morphologically reproduce an earlier state without restoring the Eigenzeit within which this form was bound.

Form can be reproduced; genealogical temporality as a second order of form-formation cannot (Speed, 2026o, 2026p).

For precisely this reason, the search for "the first deviation" must also be treated with caution. Even if a very early biological difference could be determined, the later autism would not thereby be explained. What would matter is which further form-formations this difference enabled, impeded, displaced, or made less probable.

An early difference would then not be a miniature of the later phenotype.

It would be a **displacement of the conditions of its further emergence**.

This shift from static properties to development is not in itself new. That would be another aspect. Neuroconstructivist approaches have long pointed out that developmental disorders cannot meaningfully be read backwards from a finished adult model and that similar visible performances can rest upon functionally organized systems that arose differently (Karmiloff-Smith, 1998). Dynamic developmental models likewise do not treat development as a merely linear causal chain (Thelen & Smith, 1994), while enactive autism theories describe different sensorimotor developmental trajectories within relational state spaces (van Es & Bervoets, 2022). Johnson (2017) goes further and understands the autistic phenotype as a possible adaptive developmental response to different early disturbances.

The distance of the present model therefore does not lie in the mere claim that development has a history. It lies in the question of what such a history means ontologically when real form-formation does not merely change states, but through continued response to a difference that cannot be fully closed irreversibly curves the conditions of further world-formation. And whether it is not developmental history itself, but the curvature, that more strongly shapes the phenomenon we call autism.

At this point, the actual theoretical gap begins.

The proximity to Simondon's theory of individuation is real here, but limited. There too, the finished individual is not taken as the original starting point; individuation arises from a tension-filled, not fully exhausted preindividual reality. The concept of the Gap used here, however, does not merely designate metastable potentiality or an individuation that has not yet been completed. It designates principled Non-Closure that is not abolished by any form-formation. Seinsverschiebung accordingly does not designate individuation as process, but the irreversible alteration of operatoric conditions of continuation that arises from a concrete response to this persisting Non-Closure (Simondon, 2020; Speed, 2026f, 2026g).

Autism theory now contains models of developmental cascades, primary sensory processes, heterochrony, embodiment, and dynamic interactions. De Jaegher's enactive approach has additionally already made clear that autistic perception, movement, affect, and social interaction cannot meaningfully be treated as mutually independent deficits. Sense-making arises in embodied and relational form (De Jaegher, 2013).

What is still not sufficiently described by this are **persistently different geometries of relevance and world-binding**.

It is precisely there that the next question begins.

If different form-formations imply different Eigenzeiten and thus different relational orders, under what conditions do these orders later become visible as partial non-coincidence?

The question is therefore no longer how an early difference "gives rise," in a linear sense, to a later social difference. What matters instead is that within different Eigenzeiten the same material, linguistic, or social elements can occupy different operatoric positions.

Only then can it be understood why two people perceive the same situation, use the same words, and nevertheless do not self-evidently operate within the same Raster.

The biological developmental question and later social incommensurability would then not be separate problems.

They would be different levels of appearance of the same relational displacement.

3. Seinsverschiebung: Development Changes Its Own Conditions

If development does not consist merely of a sequence of states, but every realized form simultaneously implies a particular order of further connectabilities, it is no longer sufficient to search for a chain of causes. What becomes decisive instead is which relational order becomes factical with a posited form.

It is precisely for this that the term **Seinsverschiebung** (*Shift of being*) is used within the present research programme.

The term, however, cannot be reduced to the alteration of a possibility-space. Its point of departure is the Gap as Non-Closure. Form can stabilize itself, but can never fall back completely identically upon itself. Every stabilization binds difference without finally abolishing it. Precisely for this reason, further form-formation remains necessary. In Negative Topology, Seinsverschiebung designates the irreversible alteration that arises when a concrete form responds to this persisting openness and thereby simultaneously changes the conditions of the next response (Speed, 2026f, 2026g).

Eigenzeit designates this irreversible internal curvature. It does not simply designate the history of a system, nor its movement along an already existing developmental trajectory. It arises where real world-binding binds openness without being able to close the Gap and thereby irreversibly changes the conditions of further world-formation (Speed, 2026o).

At this point, a categorical distinction is necessary. The model does not merely describe a complex or historical process. Processes explain how already distinguishable states change within an order. Operatoric implication, by contrast, designates the condition under which such an order gives rise to particular relations, connectabilities, and boundaries in the first

place. An Eigenzeit is therefore not merely the temporal sequence of its form-formations. With every realized world-binding, a particular relational order becomes factical through which other differences henceforth become connectable differently.

In this sense, Seinsverschiebung is not merely a consequence of process. A posited form implies an altered relational space. What appears within it does not possess its operatoric position independently of this Setzung. An identical element can therefore mean something operatorically different within different world-bindings without materially having lost its identity. The difference does not necessarily lie in the thing, but in the order of its possible relations.

The operatorics used here must therefore not be translated back into a process description. Where implication is meant, the question through which additional process the relation is produced would already be wrongly posed: the relation is a consequence of the posited order itself (Speed, 2026q).

A Seinsverschiebung does not designate an additional developmental stage. Nor does it designate an especially strong causal influence.

Seinsverschiebung is therefore also not a counter-concept to causality. Causal processes remain real and empirically investigable. The term instead designates the alteration of conditions of efficacy implied by Non-Closure. What is meant is not one thing acting upon another thing. With every stabilization, potential is bound; this changes the relational order within which further form is connectable. The curvature therefore lies not in an additional influence, but in the restriction of the relational total space itself.

The same genetic, sensory, or regulatory difference can permit different continuations within a later Eigenzeit than before because the relation within which it becomes effective has itself already been changed by form-formation. This is then the relativity of effect that results from non-repeatability. Precisely these minimal deviations could already correlate with those of autism.

What matters, therefore, is not that development would be “too complex” to be understood causally. Complexity, feedback, and nonlinearity are not sufficient to determine Seinsverschiebung. What matters is that every form that has become factical leaves behind a difference that cannot be fully closed and thereby changes the conditions of further form-formation.

What is meant is not a temporally localizable threshold within a process. With the Setzung of a form, a relational order is instead factical within which further effect can no longer possess the same operatoric position. The altered order of connectability does not follow from an additional process; it is implied with the Setzung.

There is a recognizable proximity here to work by Longo, Montévil, and Kauffman, who have pointed out for biological evolution that the relevant phase space itself can be historically variable and not fully predeterminable (Longo et al., 2012; Montévil, 2022). The Seinsverschiebung proposed here, however, begins at another level. Its central object is not

primarily the unpredictability of biological novelty, but the **alteration, already implied with a posited form, of the relation between formed form, persisting Non-Closure, and further operatoric connectability**.

This may at first sound similar to complex causality. Of course an earlier developmental step influences a later one. The difference, however, lies in **where the displacement is located**.

In a classical causal chain, A changes state B, and B subsequently acts upon C. The elements of this chain can be highly entangled with one another. Nevertheless, the relational order within which A, B, and C can be described as effective variables at all remains largely presupposed.

The Seinsverschiebung meant here concerns precisely this level.

One can initially imagine this as balls on a flat surface. One ball rolls into another, which strikes a third. Speed, direction, or position can change, while the surface as the order of possible relations remains the same.

For Seinsverschiebung, however, this metaphor is only of limited use. What is **not** meant is that an impact first occurs and the surface is subsequently deformed through another process. Rather, with the posited form, another relational order is already implied.

The depression or inclination of the surface therefore does not stand for an additional later event, but for the circumstance that the same ball, the same impulse, or the same distinguishable difference no longer occupies the same operatoric position within another order.

An identical element can therefore remain materially or representationally the same and nevertheless become effective differently because the relations within which it is connectable are no longer the same.

The possibility-space is not an additional material substrate alongside the organism. What is meant is the relational order of constraints, weightings, and connectabilities given with a concrete Setzung of form.

This is precisely where the difference lies: not only do states change within an order; with the Setzung of form, another order of possible relations is implied.

Causality changes what happens. Seinsverschiebung additionally designates the alteration of the conditions under which further happening can become effective at all.

Applied to biological development, this does not mean that, for example, a gene itself would have to become "distorted" through every Seinsverschiebung. Its sequence can remain unchanged. What has changed, however, are the organism, its regulatory relations, already formed structures, temporal couplings, and thus the conditions under which the same genetic influence can become effective at all.

The same influential factor can therefore produce a different effect because the space of its possible effects is no longer the same.

Seinsverschiebung therefore does not begin temporally "before" the ordinary causal chain, but on another level of description. It claims that with real form-formation not only does a new state arise, but the relation between possible future states is also changed. The organism does not simply possess different properties afterwards. It finds itself in a differently structured developmental situation.

That is the actual basis of irreversibility.

Irreversibility here does not merely mean that a later state is reached under different conditions. What matters is that a once-posited form cannot completely fall back upon itself. The difference therefore does not necessarily lie in the components themselves, but in their relational position. A gene remains a gene, a stimulus can remain physically the same, a behaviour can appear outwardly similar; nevertheless, the same element can occupy a different operatoric position within another Eigenzeit.

This difference fundamentally concerns every organism. Non-Closure and non-repeatability would be general conditions of form-formation. For autism, therefore, what is decisive is not that deformation takes place at all, but where it becomes visible at a boundary of world-binding as relevant non-coincidence. The question thereby shifts from the emergence of individual differences to their relational legibility.

In *Morphology Without Memory*, this was described as negative topology: past form-formation does not remain as complete information, but as an altered structure of connectability. What matters, then, is not a hidden autistic core, but the manner in which relational displacements can become repeatedly visible at later boundaries (Speed, 2026e).

Here, self-similarity becomes important. Different Eigenzeiten need not lead to arbitrary forms. Under comparable morphological and social constraints, they can produce similar macroscopic appearances without converging on the same internal structure. Self-similarity would then not be evidence of a common internal object, but the recurring visibility of different relational orders at similar boundaries.

Morphogenetic Pressure in this context does not designate an additional external influence, but the operative tension that arises when an existing form cannot fully neutralize a difference. The response to this can vary in sensory, attentional, regulatory, or social terms; what matters, however, is not the individual response, but that Non-Closure demands further form (Speed, 2026f).

This also explains why early markers or individual biological differences need not be read as miniatures of a later autism. They can be part of an Eigenzeit without already containing its later diagnostic unity. Diagnostic commonality can arise only where different Eigenzeiten become non-coincident at a similar Raster-boundary.

This is precisely where morphogenetic non-coincidence begins.

4. Morphogenetic Non-Coincidence: When Similar Development Does Not Produce the Same World

Up to this point, Seinsverschiebung (*Shift of being*) has been described as the non-identical continuation of form: it is not the components that must change, but their operatoric position within an irreversibly curved relational order.

The next question therefore no longer concerns the alteration of developmental conditions, but the world-relations that become possible within such different relational orders.

This, however, still does not explain why precisely those differences can arise from them that later become visible as autism or ADHD.

The decisive step lies in understanding development not only as the production of an organism, but at the same time as the production of a particular way of binding world.

An organism does not first develop a finished body and then enter with this body into an already existing world. Perception, movement, attention, sensory weighting, expectation, and interaction already arise together within development. The world to which an organism later responds is therefore not independent of the history through which it learned in the first place to perceive differences and form relevance.

Following Uexküll, world-binding can initially be understood as an organism-specific order of relevance. Eigenzeit, however, shifts this question: not only do different organisms possess different Umwelten; the conditions under which an environment can become relevant at all are themselves relationally curved.

This also shifts the concept of perception.

Perception would not merely be the reception of external information. The question of what is registered as a difference, how long a difference remains relevant, which stimulus overrides another, when attention shifts, and which regularities appear stable enough to form expectations is already a result of previous form-formation.

The organism therefore does not read out a neutral world.

Over the course of its Eigenzeit, it forms a **Raster** within which world becomes readable at all.

By Raster, what is meant here is neither a rigid template nor a conscious interpretive schema. What is meant is an operative order of differences: What is highlighted? What can be neglected? Which repetition is recognized as sameness? Which difference forces a response? Which relation appears stable enough for further expectations to be built upon it?

Such Raster do not arise only with language.

An infant already lives within temporal, sensory, and interactive regularities. Voice, movement, gaze, touch, rhythm, repetition, and interruption do not form isolated stimuli. They generate coupling relations within which it gradually becomes established which events belong together and which differences become relevant for action.

Early world-binding is therefore initially not a theory about the world.

It is a **stabilization of relations**.

It is precisely here that a small developmental difference can become far-reaching. If sensory weighting, temporal processing, attention, or motor coupling proceed slightly differently, no conspicuous behaviour need initially result. The difference can nevertheless influence which relations are stabilized more frequently and which appear less reliable.

A child can, for example, hear the same voice, perceive the same gaze, and register the same movement as another child. Nevertheless, these events need not receive the same weighting within its emerging relevance structure.

The material environment remains largely the same.

The operative world nevertheless begins to differ.

For precisely this reason, autism should not primarily be understood in this model as a destabilization of an otherwise shared cognitive system. Rather, it concerns a differently stabilized overall order of world-relation. The difference does not consist in individual functions within an already finished system merely being weakened, strengthened, or switched off. It lies in the way perception, relevance, attention, body, and social coupling are related to and weighted against one another within an Eigenzeit.

What is decisive is the level on which this takes place: world-relation. What is meant by this is not the sum of individual parts and their effects upon one another, but their overall displacement in relation to the formation of a concrete stabilization. World-relation is not a neutral background, like a stage upon which everything we see externally and feel or think internally is then added. Rather, world-relation is the world that has arisen as such because a particular person, a particular thing, stabilizes within it and thereby changes the relations.

World-relation is not arbitrary potential, but the consequence of relative stabilization within Non-Closure. This is something different from subjectivity. Subjectivity is a single relative perspective upon a static exterior that is completely separate from it. Subjectivity is, in a sense, the assumption of an inner relation to the world without this altering the world. World-relation, by contrast, designates a necessarily incomplete stabilization from which world in its concrete relational form first emerges at all. Non-Closure is a condition of world, whereas subjectivity appears as a displaced relation to an objective surface.

World-relation is a phenomenon that extends beyond the individual and concerns the world itself. The observer becomes within it an effect of the relational order and does not stand opposite it as an isolated perspective. One cannot assemble the world by adding infinitely many observers together; rather, the observer is part of the failing stabilization of world.

World-relation is therefore always confronted with a dynamic between openness and stabilization that produces ruptures and deformations. Because these cannot be located in the object, in the thing itself, it is so difficult to grasp the origin of incommensurability. One thing does not experience the same deformation as the next. The Eigenzeiten form separate curves. But when someone says: "You see the tree there just as I do," that is not the level at which neurodivergence would be located; rather, the deformation appears as negative topology (Speed, 2026g).

What may later appear from the perspective of a dominant Raster as dysregulation, deficit, or deviation can within this Eigenzeit itself represent a highly stable form of world-binding. Autistic experience would then not primarily be the sum of altered mechanisms, but the experience of a differently stabilized relational order.

Autism might therefore be more a question of topological deformation than of genetic deviation.

This also shifts the autism question toward more fundamental questions of experience and consciousness. What becomes relevant is not only which mechanisms are altered, but under what conditions a particular experiential world can stabilize at all. Biological mechanisms remain real conditions for this. They are not, however, necessarily identical with the form of world that arises from their integration into a concrete Eigenzeit.

This does not mean that autistic and non-autistic children grow up in separate worlds. Such a formulation would be too strong. The overlap is enormous. Both develop human bodies, recognize objects, acquire language, learn social regularities, and share large parts of the same material and cultural environment.

What is decisive, therefore, is not complete difference, but **partial non-coincidence**.

Morphogenetic non-coincidence designates the partial non-overlap of relational orders that, despite extensive shared form, do not imply the same operatoric weightings and continuations.

This difference can be illustrated through a simple operatoric example. Take the same distinguishable elements E, G, and I. If G is stabilized within an open order, this does not merely mean that an additional element has been named. The Setzung of G removes the potential of G from the space and changes the relations within which E and I subsequently become readable. For self-relation is reduced, which in potential was still more strongly present, and is relatively replaced by a relational reference.

An E within a G-world is therefore operatorically not fully the same E as within an I-world. Its material or representational form can remain identical; what has changed is its position within the order of possible connectabilities.

With the Setzung, elements do not simply move from potential into a finished world. Their concretization instead implies a relational order within which they become connectable as particular elements at all. World-relation therefore does not arise subsequently between

finished things, but with their stabilization itself. World-relation forms where previously there was only self-relation.

If you want to become a Something, you simultaneously become a world in which this Something can stabilize. This world is part of the stabilization and deforms the potential of all further components.

What is decisive is that this displacement need not lie at the level of individual things. A gene can remain identifiable as a gene, a brain as a brain, a stimulus as the same physical stimulus. The same elements therefore remain visible. What may have changed is the relational geometry.

This can be compared with optical distortion. A wide-angle lens leaves the same petrol station, the same red car, and the same road visible. Nevertheless, near and far, edge and centre, and size relations change. The individual objects do not disappear. But their relational order is not the same.

This analogy must again not be understood as though a perceptual error merely lay over an otherwise unchanged world. The Raster is not a subsequent bias added to a neutral reality. Bias would be an additional distortion of an order already presupposed. The Seinsverschiebung meant here instead concerns the order of relations itself. It changes which differences receive weight, which connectabilities become possible, and which forms can coincide with one another within this order.

The decisive difference can therefore lie precisely where the material components remain visible and measurable. One sees the gene. One sees the brain. One sees the behaviour. What cannot be isolated in the same way is the historically displaced overall relation within which these elements can produce, weight, or continue something differently.

It is precisely here that the function of the Raster lies. A Raster does not neutrally represent a world that is already fully determined. It implies a particular order of differences, neighbourhoods, relevances, and continuations. With every such determination, other relational possibilities are excluded, displaced, or become accessible only through translation. Complete mappability between different Raster-orders is therefore not self-evidently given.

Morphogenetic non-coincidence therefore designates not only different developmental pathways. It designates the possibility that seemingly identical elements occupy different operatoric positions within different Eigenzeiten.

The trajectory is therefore only the subsequent spatial representation of a deeper operatoric displacement. Movement along the path is not the primary phenomenon. What matters is that every factual world-binding implies an order within which the same differences can subsequently occupy different relational positions. The represented deformation of space designates this altered operatorics.

This distinguishes the model from state-space approaches in which autistic and non-autistic development are described as different navigation within a shared multidimensional space

(van Es & Bervoets, 2022). The concept of Eigenzeit used here instead designates the irreversible deformation of this space itself that has arisen through real world-binding.

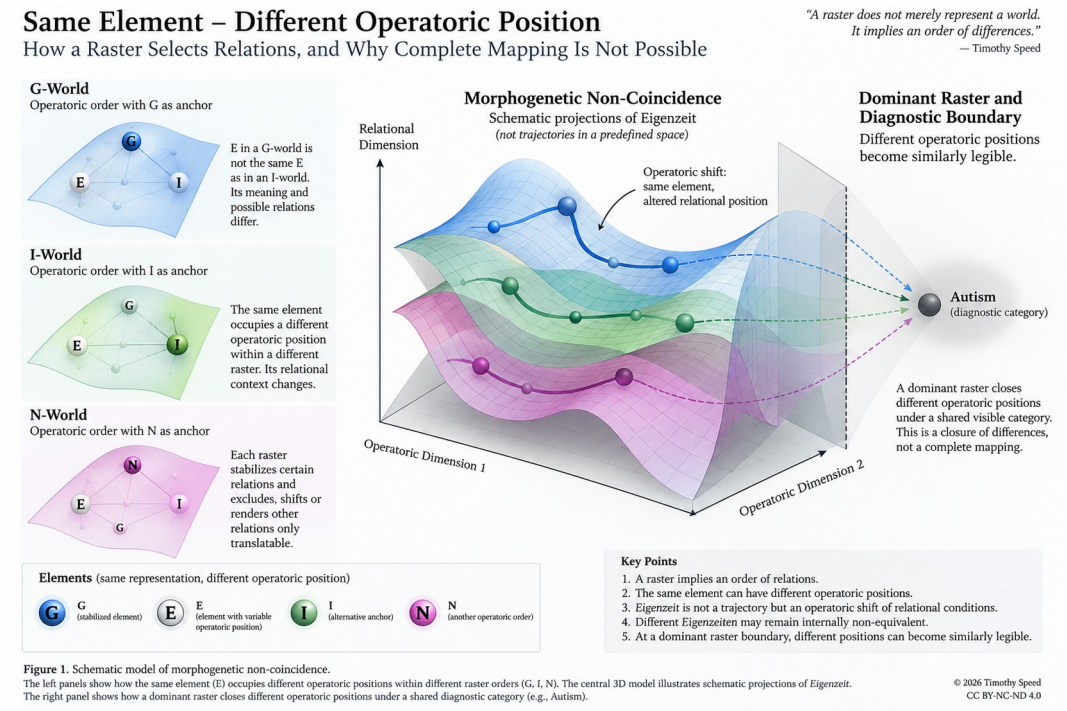
Same Element – Different Operatoric Position
How a Raster Selects Relations, and Why Complete Mapping Is Not Possible
"A raster does not merely represent a world. It implies an order of differences."
— Timothy Speed
G-World
Operatoric order with G as anchor
E in a G-world is not the same E as in an I-world. Its meaning and possible relations differ.
I-World
Operatoric order with I as anchor
The same element occupies a different operatoric position within a different raster. Its relational context changes.
N-World
Operatoric order with N as anchor
Each raster stabilizes certain relations and excludes, shifts or renders other relations only translatable.
Morphogenetic Non-Coincidence
Schematic projections of Eigenzeit
(not trajectories in a predefined space)
Relational Dimension
Operatoric shift: same element, altered relational position
Operatoric Dimension 1
Operatoric Dimension 2
Dominant Raster and Diagnostic Boundary
Different operatoric positions become similarly legible.
Autism
(diagnostic category)
A dominant raster closes different operatoric positions under a shared visible category. This is a closure of differences, not a complete mapping.
Elements (same representation, different operatoric position)
G (stabilized element)
E (element with variable operatoric position)
I (alternative anchor)
N (another operatoric order)
Key Points
1. A raster implies an order of relations.
2. The same element can have different operatoric positions.
3. Eigenzeit is not a trajectory but an operatoric shift of relational conditions.
4. Different Eigenzeiten may remain internally non-equivalent.
5. At a dominant raster boundary, different positions can become similarly legible.
Figure 1. Schematic model of morphogenetic non-coincidence.
The left panels show how the same element (E) occupies different operatoric positions within different raster orders (G, I, N). The central 3D model illustrates schematic projections of Eigenzeit.
The right panel shows how a dominant raster closes different operatoric positions under a shared diagnostic category (e.g., Autism).
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Figure X. Schematic model of morphogenetic non-coincidence. The depicted trajectories are projections of Eigenzeit rather than Eigenzeit itself. Real world-binding does not merely move a system through a predefined space; it implies a changed relational order in which otherwise similar elements can acquire different operatoric positions. Different Eigenzeiten may therefore remain internally non-equivalent while becoming similarly legible at a dominant raster boundary. The visible diagnostic boundary represents a closure of these differences, not their complete mapping.

The form can converge while the geometry of its relations diverges.

This makes it understandable why differences can remain invisible for a long time.

Two people can recognize and name the same object. They can know the same rule. They can understand the same sentence grammatically and semantically. It does not follow from this, however, that this object, this rule, or this sentence occupies the same position within their respective world-binding. Comparable separations between understanding and operative processing can also be found in dyslexia or other learning disorders: content can be semantically available while its access, temporal processing, or embedding into further operations is organized differently. **The same knowledge therefore need not produce the same form of access to world.**

Representation can coincide. Operative weighting need not.

This difference may be essential for autism. A considerable part of social understanding does not rest on people explicitly possessing the same information. It rests on their tacitly weighting in similar ways **which information matters now**.

When is a statement literally binding and when only approximately meant? When may a rule recede in favour of context? Which inconsistency is negligible? When is a conversation finished even though unresolved factual questions remain? Which information must be stated and which is taken for granted? When does a change constitute a genuine rupture and when merely a socially expected adjustment?

Such differences are rarely contained in the explicit content of a situation.

They lie in the Raster of its weighting. And this weighting is not readily transferable between two Eigenzeiten. In this respect, the problem resembles the classical question from consciousness research of whether two people who both reliably say "red" and recognize the same colour field can thereby know whether red is qualitatively the same red for the other. Shared naming and functional agreement do not yet guarantee identity of the underlying experiential or relevance order.

For social world-binding, this problem becomes even more pronounced. Here the issue is not only how something is experienced, but what operatoric position a difference occupies: What may be ignored? What demands continuation? What counts as closed? What produces a rupture? Two people can therefore describe the same situation correctly and nevertheless not operate within the same relational geometry.

This allows the familiar difficulty of autistic people in "entering" certain social situations to be formulated differently. The problem would then not primarily be that information is missing or that social signs are fundamentally not understood.

The problem may lie in the fact that **the same signs operate within different relational geometries**.

The map can coincide while the geometry beneath the map is different.

An autistic person can know what a social convention means and nevertheless not self-evidently assign it the same operative priority. Conversely, an inconsistency, a rule violation, a sensory detail, or a conceptual imprecision can possess substantially greater operative relevance than for other people in the same situation.

Understanding and operative self-evidence can therefore come apart.

This is not a mere preference. Within the model proposed here, this weighting possesses Eigenzeit: it belongs to a historically formed order of relevance and not merely to a retrospective evaluation of individual situations.

This also makes it understandable why later social differences cannot readily be treated as isolated "social deficits." If relevance formation builds upon earlier sensory, temporal, motor, and interactive form-formations, then social world-binding is not a separate module added

retrospectively to an otherwise finished development. It is an expression of the same relational order.

At this point, the model touches enactive and relational approaches. De Jaegher has shown that perception, movement, affect, and social interaction in autism cannot meaningfully be treated as mutually separate deficits. Meaning arises in embodied interaction and in the process of *participatory sense-making* (De Jaegher, 2013).

Erin Manning's concept of the *minor gesture* is also connectable here. Manning uses the term to designate small, often barely perceptible shifts that are not simply added to an existing relational field, but can alter that field's very possibilities of relation (Manning, 2016). What is particularly relevant for neurodivergent perception is that difference does not first appear as a finished deviation, but can already lie in the way a field of perception, movement, and relevance takes form at all.

For the model developed here, what is especially connectable is the shift from isolated properties to relational order. Morphogenetic non-coincidence, however, does not primarily designate a process through which a relational field is altered. What is meant is the absence of any guarantee that the same difference occupies the same operatoric position within different Eigenzeiten.

This also establishes the connection to the Double Empathy problem: social non-fit would not merely be an encounter phenomenon between different modes of communication, but the later encounter of relevance orders that have already stabilized differently. Chapter 7 returns to this relational level.

For this very reason, neurotypical development should not be treated in this model as a neutral zero line. "Neurotypical" designates neither development without Eigenzeit nor development without Raster. Neurotypical world-binding too is the result of particular histories of form.

Its special status arises rather from the fact that certain developmental trajectories are more frequently compatible with one another socially, institutionally, and communicatively and thereby become stabilized as a dominant order.

What appears self-evident therefore need not be ontologically neutral.

It may simply be the Raster that overlaps more frequently.

This also shifts the paper's initial question.

Why can an autistic person, despite shared language, shared objects, and often high cognitive abilities, not self-evidently "dock" into a neurotypically stabilized world?

Because docking requires more than shared information.

It requires sufficient overlap between those relational weightings through which information becomes operative at all.

Shared representation is not identical with shared world-relation.

Two people can describe the same world and nevertheless find footing at different points within it.

Morphogenetic non-coincidence designates precisely this condition: no complete separation, no absolute otherness, but a partial displacement of those relational geometries within which perception, relevance, and action become connectable.

This also makes it understandable why the boundary between coincidence and non-coincidence need not run in the same place everywhere.

An autistic person can achieve very high operative agreement with other people in a mathematical, technical, artistic, or strongly factually structured field and, a few minutes later, experience substantial non-coincidence in an implicit social situation.

The difference then does not lie in the person as a constant deficit.

It arises in the relation between Raster-forms.

The Eigenzeit does not change with context. What differs is the Raster-boundary at which its operatorics coincide or fail to coincide. Visible difference is therefore not solely a property of a person, but a boundary phenomenon of a concrete relational fit.

It is precisely there that the **Glitch** appears.

The Glitch does not simply designate an error of the autistic system. It arises where two sufficiently stable forms of world-binding encounter one another but their relations cannot be completely translated into one another (Speed, 2026d; Speed, 2026g).

It is therefore not counterevidence against a shared world.

It is the trace of its incomplete overlap.

And it is precisely at this point that biological developmental divergence becomes a social problem of docking. Not because "sociality" failed somewhere along the way, but because two historically formed relevance spaces are now attempting to stabilize the same situation together.

The next question is therefore no longer **whether** both see the same world.

It is:

What happens when two Eigenzeiten attempt to bind the same world together, but their Raster do not overlap sufficiently?

There begins the problem of Glitch, Morphogenetic Pressure, monotropism, and finally masking.

5. Where Incommensurability Arises: Operator, Relevance, and Embodied Binding

Chapter 4 described morphogenetic non-coincidence as a partial displacement of relational world-binding. Two people can recognize the same objects, use the same words, and share large parts of the same material and social world without the relations within that world occupying the same operatoric positions for both.

The question of this chapter is therefore no longer **where** the difference lies.

It is:

How does a difference between world-relations become operative within the same situation?

Or, more precisely: Why can the same element possess the same representational identity within two Eigenzeiten and nevertheless imply different continuations, relevances, and binding constraints?

It is precisely here that the concept of the operator becomes necessary.

An operator is not an additional thing within the organism. It designates the position that a difference occupies within a stabilized relational order with regard to possible continuations. What matters is not only *what is present*, but **what can follow from this difference within the respective world-relation**.

A gene can remain identical. A stimulus can remain identical. A spoken word can remain identical. And yet the same element can **do** something different within two Eigenzeiten because it occupies different operatoric positions within different world-relations.

Incommensurability therefore does not necessarily begin with different information. It can already begin where the same difference within two world-relations **does not imply the same continuation**.

A social signal can be perceptible to both. Both can know its meaning. Both can even give the same linguistic explanation of it. Nevertheless, this signal can possess a different operative priority within one world-binding than within the other.

This is where relevance-binding begins.

Relevance in this model is not a retrospective evaluation of information that has already been fully processed. Relevance designates **which difference within a given operatorics forces further form**.

A sentence can be understood and nevertheless fail to produce the same action. A rule can be known and nevertheless fail to possess the same binding force. A stimulus can be physically minor and nevertheless become operatorically impossible to ignore.

An inconsistency can remain negligible within one world-binding and, within another, generate so much open difference that further continuation becomes unstable without addressing it.

This also gives Raster a more precise meaning.

The Raster is not simply a mental schema through which world is viewed. It is the stabilized order of **which differences can connect to which further operations**.

This is why one can learn a foreign Raster without operating from within it.

One can know that something is supposed to be important. One can learn to perform the expected behaviour reliably. But it does not follow from this that the same difference generates the same form-constraint within one's own operatorics.

Learning can expand the set of available operations. It does not necessarily replace the Eigenzeit from which one operates.

It is precisely here that the boundary between translatability and incommensurability lies.

New rules, conventions, and social forms can be learned and incorporated into one's own space of action. The problem begins where connection becomes possible only by continuously suspending the operations through which one's own world-relation is continued.

Then it is no longer a matter of learning an additional rule.

It is a matter of **maintaining a foreign operatorics against one's own**.

An Eigenzeit cannot do this indefinitely.

This does not mean that world-relation is immutable. Learning, adaptation, and transformation remain possible. New operations can arise, weightings can shift, routines can become automated, and previously foreign relations can be incorporated. But transformation is not exchange.

World-relation is changeable, but it is not exchangeable like a set of rules. An Eigenzeit can incorporate new relations, shift weightings, and form new operations. But it cannot step outside its own world-binding to a neutral point and from there take over another world-relation.

Irreversibility thereby acquires a social and cognitive meaning.

It concerns not only biological form-formation, but also those orders of relevance through which environment, other people, and one's own action become continuable at all.

An order of relevance is therefore not a collection of preferences. It determines which differences can remain without consequence, which must be taken up, and which can be suppressed only at considerable cost.

The difference between two world-bindings can therefore lie in the fact that **the same information has different operative consequences**.

This can be illustrated through a simple social situation.

One person notices a contradiction in a conversation. Within the dominant social situation, this contradiction may be negligible. The relationship is meant to continue, the conversational rhythm is to be maintained, and the factual inconsistency has only low priority compared with these demands.

For another person, the same contradiction may destabilize the situation precisely. As long as it is unclear which of the two statements is supposed to hold, it remains open what further statements can be built upon at all.

Both people have perceived the same contradiction. Both can explain what it consists in. Both can even understand why the other side reacts differently.

And yet the same difference does not imply the same continuation within their respective operatorics.

Here, incommensurability does not lie in missing information. It lies in **different conditions of operatoric continuability**.

This also makes clear why incommensurability does not simply disappear through more explanation. Explanation can provide additional information, make foreign rules visible, and enable new translation operations. But it does not necessarily alter those differences that continue to generate Morphogenetic Pressure within the respective operatorics.

A person can understand why an inconsistency is supposed to be ignored. That does not yet make it ignorable for them.

They can understand why a sensory stimulus is insignificant for others without that stimulus becoming neutral for their own world-binding.

They can understand why a social gesture is expected without that gesture acquiring the same self-evidence within their own order of relevance.

Understanding changes the set of available operations. It does not guarantee the abolition of the difference to which those operations respond.

Incommensurability therefore means neither unintelligibility nor total otherness.

It designates a **boundary of lossless translatability between differently stabilized world-relations and their operatoric orders**.

Translation can succeed without the underlying operatorics becoming identical.

The necessity of a translation operation can itself indicate that a form which emerges immediately from one side's own world-binding has to be additionally produced on the other side.

The visible result can be identical. The operatoric production is not.

It is precisely here that Morphogenetic Pressure becomes relevant.

Morphogenetic Pressure is not an external force vector. It arises where an existing difference within an existing operatorics cannot remain without consequence. It must be integrated, rejected, bypassed, amplified, compensated, reweighted, or transferred into another relation.

The form-constraint lies precisely in the fact that **non-operation is not a neutral possibility**.

Ignoring is also an operation. Suppression, repetition, withdrawal, or stabilization are likewise forms in which a relation to difference is established.

When two world-relations imply different continuations within the same situation, Morphogenetic Pressure therefore does not necessarily arise "in the autistic person."

It can arise in the relation because a common form has to be produced even though the participating operatorics do not immediately produce it in the same way.

At this point, the model connects directly to the field model of masking developed earlier. There, masking was not understood primarily as concealing an authentic person, but as compatibility and form-formation work between partially non-coinciding orders of relevance. High structural distance can make additional translation operations necessary even though the visible action ultimately appears completely socially compatible (Speed, 2026h).

The theory developed here adds the morphogenetic side of this problem. It asks not only **between which orders of relevance** compatibility work becomes necessary, but **why the same situation does not imply the same continuation within different world-relations**.

The person therefore does not necessarily mask because they failed to understand the social situation.

They may mask precisely because they understood it.

They know the expected continuation, but their own operatorics does not immediately produce it. An additional operation must therefore be generated that mediates between their own order of relevance and the dominant Raster.

That is the decisive difference between simple social learning and *incommensurability-induced masking*.

Such an operation can also become automated.

Automation, however, does not necessarily abolish the underlying relation.

A person can speak a foreign language almost flawlessly without the two language systems becoming identical. Correspondingly, an autistic person can automate social routines to a high degree without the underlying order of relevance having to become the same.

Automation may reduce the cost of translation. It does not necessarily eliminate the translation relation.

For this reason, masking cannot reliably be inferred from visible effort. A highly automated compatibility operation can appear effortless from the outside while the person continues to mediate between different operatoric orders (Speed, 2026h).

Not every translation threatens world-relation.

People constantly move between roles, languages, situations, and institutional demands. Different Raster can even expand one another and bring forth new common forms.

The situation becomes problematic where only one of the participating operatorics is permitted as a valid continuation. Then the other side must no longer merely translate, but interrupt its own continuation.

The neurodivergent person must not only understand what the other side means.

They must learn **which of their own relevances must not become visible even though they continue to possess operative reality within their own world-binding**.

An inconsistency must remain unresolved. A sensory stimulus must be treated as though it were insignificant. A direct statement must be transferred into a socially expected indirect form. An object of intense attention must be left because the dominant Raster already demands the shift.

Here masking becomes more than a change of surface. It becomes a **regulation of operatoric visibility**.

The person does not necessarily have to stop operating from their own order of relevance. They must, however, prevent this operation from directly determining the socially visible form.

Two levels thereby arise:

The first operation continues one's own world-relation.

The second produces a form that becomes connectable within the foreign Raster.

The further apart the two lie, the greater the necessary compatibility work can become.

It is precisely here that the tension formulated in *They Cannot Understand* acquires a structural meaning. The paradoxical situation does not consist in an autistic person being unintelligible in principle. It arises where the dominant Raster can understand only a form of the person that has already been translated so far that the original difference is no longer visible within it (Speed, 2025).

The person becomes understandable by making the conditions of their unintelligibility invisible.

A double bind can thereby arise.

If they act visibly from their own operatorics, they may appear irrational, inflexible, or socially inappropriate. If they translate successfully, the difference itself can become invisible.

The system may thereby demand evidence of a difference whose successful compensation is simultaneously read as evidence against its existence.

Precisely because world-relation, as described in the previous chapter, is not an additional property of a person but the relational order within which world becomes continuable for them at all, a permanent suspension of one's own operatorics reaches deeper than ordinary adaptation (Speed, 2026m).

This gives a more precise formulation of the apparently paradoxical statement from *They Cannot Understand*:

One cannot, under every condition, simultaneously exist fully from within one's own Eigenzeit and be fully understandable within a foreign Raster.

The "cannot" does not designate a metaphysical impossibility of understanding.

It designates the boundary of a form of intelligibility that demands that only those operations already provided for within the dominant Raster may appear meaningful.

Incommensurability is therefore neither speechlessness nor total otherness, but a **boundary of lossless translatability between differently stabilized world-relations and their operatoric orders**.

Precisely for this reason, it can be partial.

In many situations, sufficient overlap arises for joint action. Other differences can be translated without difficulty or changed through common form-formation.

Where, however, the same difference touches different conditions of their own stability for two world-relations, translation can become structurally demanding.

The Glitch marks the moment at which the participating operatorics no longer tacitly produce the same continuation.

What had previously remained concealed through shared language, similar bodies, or learned conventions becomes visible as non-coincidence.

Morphogenetic Pressure may then arise not simply "in the autistic person."

It arises in the relation because a common form still has to be produced even though the participating operatorics do not immediately bring it forth in the same way.

Who takes on this additional form-formation is not an ontological but a social question.

That this compatibility work is socially distributed asymmetrically is therefore not a necessary consequence of neurodivergent existence, but a question of how social and institutional Raster are designed (Speed, 2026h, 2026m).

How this can look over a period of more than ten years as a problematic developmental course can be read, for example, in the book *Speed's Work* (Speed, 2025b), or in the *1667* study

on violence against neurodivergent people in the German social welfare system (Speed, 2026r).

6. Monotropism as the Deepening of Relevance Paths

If relevance belongs to world-relation itself and is not only subsequently placed upon information that has already been perceived, then the question of autistic attention also changes.

Attention would then not merely be the distribution of a limited resource across already given objects. It would be an expression of **which relations within an Eigenzeit possess operative depth and can carry further world-formation**.

Monotropism is often described as a tendency to concentrate attention strongly on a limited number of interests, stimuli, or activities. Murray, Lesser, and Lawson (2005), however, go further. They describe monotropic interests as "deep basins of attraction," emphasize strong internal connections, and the difficulty of making alternative attractors available.

The present model therefore does not claim this structure as a new description.

Its question lies one level earlier:

Why do certain relations within an Eigenzeit possess such high operative depth that their continuation carries world, while a shift into other relations can produce a greater loss of connectability?

Monotropism would then not initially be a property of an already finished autistic system. It could be understood as a particularly visible form of a relational organization of relevance within an Eigenzeit.

What matters, therefore, would not simply be the breadth of attention.

What matters would be the **geometry of its transitions**.

A world-relation can be broadly capable of processing information and nevertheless organize individual relations with very different operative depth. Certain differences can become highly connectable, while others possess only little binding force.

The question is therefore not only how much attention is available, but **how easily an already carrying relation can be left and what loss of form such a transition produces**.

Here, Morphogenetic Pressure becomes relevant again.

If a relevance structure has already strongly stabilized a situation, the demand for an abrupt shift does not merely create a new task. It can require leaving a relation whose open differences have not yet been sufficiently bound within one's own operatorics.

A conversation partner may say:

“We’ll talk about it later.”

For the dominant social Raster, the situation may thereby be sufficiently stabilized. For another operatorics, however, the unresolved factual question may continue to generate operative tension.

The shift then does not merely demand a displacement of attention. It demands leaving a relation that, within one’s own world-relation, has not yet been sufficiently stabilized to be interrupted without greater loss of form.

This could explain why seemingly minor interruptions, topic changes, or unexpected transitions can have a very strong effect on some autistic people.

Not because change is fundamentally intolerable.

But because different world-relations can possess different conditions for **when a relation is sufficiently stabilized to be left or suspended with little loss**.

What appears from the outside as “holding on” could therefore, within Eigenzeit, be a movement of form that has not yet been sufficiently stabilized.

This also changes the meaning of so-called special interests.

A special interest would then not necessarily be simply an especially strong hobby or an unusually high preference.

It could be a field **in which world-relation achieves particularly high operative viability**.

There, differences can carry further productive differences. Knowledge can condense. Relations become more sustainable. New information does not have to rebuild the relational order constantly, but can connect to continuations that are already highly connectable.

Such a field may therefore possess a particular operative depth.

A person can not only know more within it. They can form world better within it.

For this reason, interruption of such a field cannot readily be compared with switching between two equivalent leisure activities.

The deformation of Eigenzeit and its binding is not on the same level as the stage upon which neurotypical people may organize their cooperation flexibly along social rules and energy distribution. But the question of change can pull one person’s Eigenzeit onto the flexible stage of the other, and suddenly what for one person means “Could you just quickly…?” becomes an earthquake of destroyed existential relation for the other. The instruction to do A, then B, then C may under such circumstances not only make no sense; the relational connections and basic conditions required to translate this into action may be missing, which can then often be experienced as an internal blockage.

If an interest has become a central domain of stable world-binding, its interruption can mean the loss of a space in which one's own world-relation can be continued with particular coherence.

Here the connection to incommensurability closes.

The dominant social Raster often evaluates attention according to situational flexibility. Attention is regarded as appropriate when it quickly shifts to what is socially marked as relevant at that moment.

What encounter one another are therefore not merely two styles of attention.

What encounter one another are different conditions for **when a transition appears possible with little loss at all**.

This is not an absolute separation.

Neurotypical people also know deep concentration, interest-binding, flow, and resistance to interruption. Autistic people can also switch flexibly.

The difference therefore need not be categorical. It can lie in the density, depth, and distribution of such bindings.

Monotropism would then be neither a foreign principle outside general human development nor necessarily a marker of autism.

Rather, it could be a particularly visible form of the fact that, within different Eigenzeiten, certain relations possess different operative depth.

The central sentence is therefore:

What repeatedly carries world acquires the capacity to carry further world.

This does not mean a mechanical reinforcement loop.

It is not repetition as an additional cause that first generates the operatorics. Rather, already stabilized relational orders can carry further connectabilities with differing degrees of ease. Repetition makes this operative asymmetry visible and can further deepen it morphogenetically.

A relevance path therefore possesses operative depth where, within a world-relation, particularly many further operations are connectable to it. The more strongly such a path carries world, the greater the corresponding loss can be when it has to be left abruptly.

The binding can thereby deepen further, but not as a mechanical cycle and not as an inevitable development, but as a possible morphogenetic dynamic.

This also makes clear why monotropism need not produce only restriction, because deep relevance paths can enable highly complex form-formation. Scientific, artistic, technical, or systematic work can benefit precisely from a relation being continued over long periods of time instead of being constantly abandoned in favour of changing social relevances.

The same relational configuration can therefore become visible under different Raster-conditions as an ability or as a disability.

What matters is not only the relevance structure itself, but **how a particular world-relation can be continued within the respective field**.

A deeply stabilized relevance path can be highly productive in one field and lead to persistent non-coincidence in another.

The theory therefore returns once more to relation.

Autism would therefore not lie "in" monotropism here either. Monotropism could instead be a particularly visible form of the fact that, within different Eigenzeiten, certain relations possess different operative depth and thereby make world differently continuable.

This establishes the connection to the Double Empathy problem.

If two people do not merely possess different information, but within their world-relations have different operative conditions for when attention can shift, a question can be provisionally stabilized, or a difference can be left without consequence, then mutual misunderstanding does not begin only with the interpretation of the other person.

It begins already with the question,

which world is action-relevant for both at the same moment at all.

7. Double Empathy as an Encounter Phenomenon of Different Eigenzeiten

The Double Empathy problem describes the fact that difficulties of understanding between autistic and non-autistic people cannot be understood one-sidedly as a deficit of the autistic person. Misunderstandings arise relationally between differently organized forms of experience and communication.

The present model connects to work that already treats social non-fit as a relational and development-dependent phenomenon. In particular, the Dialectical Misattunement Hypothesis describes interpersonal non-fit as a dynamic process across different levels and timescales (Bolis et al., 2017), while ecological and enactive approaches show how sensorimotor development, niche construction, and social interaction can interlock (Constant et al., 2020; van Es & Bervoets, 2022).

The additional step of the present model, however, does not consist in merely explaining misunderstandings ontogenetically. It consists in understanding the participating Eigenzeiten as **different operatoric geometries**. Double Empathy would then be the social manifestation of a deeper non-coincidence.

Two Eigenzeiten encounter one another whose orders of relevance, Raster, and forms of operatoric continuability do not fully overlap. The problem therefore does not begin only

where one person misinterprets the other. It already begins where the same situation does not highlight the same differences for both and does not imply the same continuations.

One and the same utterance can primarily function as relationship regulation for one side and as information transmission for the other. A pause can count as socially unremarkable or as an unresolved interruption. A direct statement can appear as precision or as harshness. Both sides can in each case act coherently from within their own operatorics.

Double Empathy then designates the social surface of a deeper morphogenetic non-coincidence.

This does not mean that every difficulty of understanding must be deeply grounded in Eigenzeit. Much remains cultural, situational, or learnable. But where different Eigenzeiten stabilize the same situation within different orders of relevance and continuation, mutual understanding can reach limits even though both sides are well-intentioned and linguistically competent.

Precisely for this reason, the demand that only one side must acquire "social competence" is theoretically insufficient. It treats relational non-coincidence as an individual error.

The question then is not only how one person can adapt better to the other, but:

What form of shared world-binding can arise without one of the participating Eigenzeiten having to give up its own operatorics?

Double Empathy thereby shifts from a deficit problem to a problem of shared form-formation.

And precisely there begins the question of **Co-Formation, Raster-overlap, and the conditions of a world in which different Eigenzeiten can actually operate together**. This connects to the idea of ontological co-existence (Speed, 2026n).

8. The Possible Fundamental Error: Autism as a Boundary Phenomenon of an Operatoric Order

We should ask whether the phenomenon of autism can be captured by a marker at all, or ever will be. One must not fall into the trap of one's own Raster, which evaluates everything that deviates in relation to that Raster.

A deviation from a dominant Raster can arise through very different pathways. But everything appears foreign, everything appears like autism.

Different early conditions, sensory weightings, temporal couplings, regulatory shifts, and Seinsverschiebungen (*Shifts of being*) can lead to different Eigenzeiten. These Eigenzeiten need by no means be identical to one another, but they can look similar within a neurotypically stabilized Raster.

The Raster then sees reduced eye contact, unusual attention, direct language, repetition, withdrawal, sensory reaction, social irritation, or particular forms of interest-binding. It sees the point at which another Eigenzeit **becomes visible within its own order**.

But in doing so, it does not yet necessarily see the phenomenon that produced this visibility.

One can imagine this like a border.

Anyone who investigates migration exclusively from the perspective of a border crossing can describe very precisely which people arrive there. Age, clothing, language, origin, luggage, behaviour, and numerous other characteristics can be recorded. From the first hundred people, one could even construct a detailed profile.

But this profile would not be a theory of migration. Migration does not lie as a property within the individual migrant. The individual person makes visible **that migration has taken place**. They do not, however, contain the entire path, nor the conditions, decisions, constraints, boundaries, movements, and historical changes through which this path arose.

The more strongly migration is defined through the characteristics of those people who become visible at a particular border, the greater even becomes the danger of losing the actual phenomenon.

See racism.

The first observed migrants define what migration looks like. Later people are compared with this profile. Whoever corresponds to it is recognized as a migrant. Whoever looks different, speaks differently, arrived by another route, or appears at another point fits the category increasingly poorly.

In the end, the measurement begins to confirm what it itself had previously established as the visible form.

Precisely here may lie a fundamental problem of autism research.

Autistic people are investigated where their Eigenzeit becomes visible within an existing Raster. From these visible differences arise traits, scales, and diagnostic categories. New people are then judged according to how closely they correspond to these already stabilized forms of visibility.

This can produce recursive evidence production. Research defines autism through those forms that it is capable of recognizing. Diagnosis in turn selects people according to precisely these forms. The resulting population is then studied in order to determine what autism is.

The category begins to produce its own evidence.

This must be distinguished from the looping effect in Hacking's narrower sense (2007): this arises where a classification additionally acts back upon the people classified, upon their self-understanding, their possibilities for action, or their institutional treatment, and these changes in turn influence the classification.

A closer ontological proximity can be found in Hollin (2017), who, drawing on Barad's *agential realism*, shows how practices of autism research can participate in bringing forth what subsequently appears as an ontological property of the object.

The present proposal, however, does not begin only with scientific classification. It connects object formation with Gap, Seinsverschiebung, and Eigenzeit. The diagnostic Raster does not encounter a presuppositionless difference, but already curved world-bindings. Its constitutive effect lies in making different Eigenzeiten readable within a common boundary relation and closable under a common representation.

Research then no longer merely observes autism. It participates in determining **which forms can become visible as autism at all**.

The problem would then not merely be a wrongly chosen test.

It would be deeper.

One attempts to recognize an Eigenzeit through its boundary phenomenon.

That different developmental pathways can lead to similar outcomes is not itself a new thought. Developmental psychopathology describes this as equifinality (Cicchetti & Rogosch, 1996). Johnson's adaptive developmental model of autism likewise explicitly assumes a *many-to-one relation*: different early biological starting conditions can converge upon a common adaptive response and a similar autistic phenotype (Johnson, 2017).

It is precisely here, however, that the stronger claim of the present model begins.

Morphogenetic non-coincidence does not presuppose that different pathways ultimately converge upon the same internal developmental form.

Different Eigenzeiten can stabilize different world-relations whose operatoric geometries do not fully overlap. Their apparent commonality may arise only where these different world-relations encounter the same dominant Raster.

The commonality would then not necessarily lie within the Eigenzeiten themselves. It would arise partly at the boundary at which they are made readable.

In the spatial model, this would correspond to the attempt to reconstruct an entire relational order from a visible boundary surface.

The dominant Raster, however, is not merely a passive observer. A Raster stabilizes world by resolving, weighting, combining, and closing differences under recognizable representations. Precisely because real Eigenzeiten are never fully closable, regions of incommensurability arise at such boundaries of closure.

Different Eigenzeiten can there be brought together under the same representational form even though they do not share an identical internal structure.

The Raster therefore does not merely distort the phenomenon retrospectively. It participates in bringing forth that boundary phenomenon which is subsequently read as a common object.

The Raster can mistake the unity of its representation for the unity of the phenomenon.

More precisely still: the Raster does not cause the underlying Eigenzeit. It does, however, imply the conditions under which this Eigenzeit can appear within its order as coincident, non-coincident, understandable, deviant, or diagnostically relevant.

The Raster is therefore also not equivalent to a mere observational bias. A bias would presuppose that the phenomenon already exists independently of observation in fully the same form and is subsequently merely read in a distorted way.

The present model begins earlier.

The Raster-order itself belongs to the relation within which differences acquire weight, lose or gain translatability, and finally become visible as a common boundary phenomenon.

Bias is an addition. Distortion is not.

Autistic non-coincidence would therefore not merely be a hidden biological difference that diagnosis recognizes more or less correctly. It could lie in the displaced overall relation within which real biological, sensory, cognitive, and social elements operate together.

The diagnostic Raster makes this displacement visible without standing outside its geometry.

The boundary therefore does not arise only through a later misinterpretation of an already fully given object. It belongs to the operatoric order within which the phenomenon becomes readable in this form at all.

A dominant Raster therefore does not generate biological or embodied difference out of nothing. But it does generate that relation of legibility within which different differences can appear as the same kind of deviation.

The category is not merely a description of a boundary. It is a form of its closure.

In this sense, autism would not necessarily be a common internal form, but the representational closure of different Eigenzeiten at the same boundary.

Autism thus appears in this model as an **operatoric boundary phenomenon**.

What is meant is not a hidden object that exists fully within the organism and merely becomes imperfectly visible at the diagnostic boundary.

What becomes visible instead is a relation: a particular form of non-coincidence between a world-relation bound in Eigenzeit and a Raster whose order of closure cannot fully accommodate that world-relation.

Autism would therefore not primarily be the result of several things, factors, or forces interacting and ultimately producing a common state.

It designates the form in which an operatoric difference becomes readable at a particular boundary.

Precisely for this reason, the phenomenon cannot be fully understood at that boundary either.

The boundary shows non-coincidence. It does not, however, contain the relational geometry whose non-coincidence becomes visible there.

Diagnostically visible traits can therefore be real manifestations of this boundary without fully containing the morphogenetic and operatoric structure that brought them forth.

A marker could capture a condition, a substructure, or a recurring form of this boundary phenomenon without thereby necessarily marking "autism itself."

The difference from a multifactorial explanation is fundamental.

A multifactorial theory still presupposes that different factors act upon a phenomenon that can subsequently be described as a common result.

The present model, by contrast, allows for the possibility that **the unity of this result itself arises only within the Raster**.

And that the origin is not an object, but the boundary of legibility resulting from incommensurability itself.

The question then is no longer only which causes produce autism, but under which operatoric conditions different Eigenzeiten appear as "autism" at the same boundary of closure — and what they might appear as if the Raster resolved other differences, weighted other relations, or permitted other forms of continuability.

This conjecture touches the existing ontological debate about autism. Chapman and Veit (2021) have pointed out that agreement at the level of visible surface traits by no means proves that these appearances are grounded in a common natural essence. Bervoets and Hens (2020) likewise problematize the relation between diagnostic category, research, and the question of what is designated by "autism" at all.

The step proposed here, however, goes beyond the question of whether a diagnostic category correctly represents a natural unity or merely gathers heterogeneous appearances under one name.

The shared surface would not merely possibly be classified artifactually. **It could itself emerge as a shared surface only within a particular Raster-relation.**

This means: the category would not merely retrospectively group together different phenomena that were already fully given. The Raster's order of closure would participate in

determining **which differences become comparable at all, which appear under the same representation, and which other possible readings remain invisible.**

Different Eigenzeit-curvatures then become jointly visible not because they necessarily possess the same internal structure, but because they become non-coincident in a similar way at the same Raster-boundary.

Several non-identical Eigenzeiten can appear similar there. The boundary phenomenon is therefore real, but it is not identical with the relational world-relations that become visible at it.

The distinction is decisive: **The question is not only whether "autism" is the right category for an already existing phenomenon. The question is whether the form in which the phenomenon appears as a unity itself arises partly from the operatoric order of the Raster.**

The ontological question thereby shifts from:

What is autism really?

to:

Under what conditions does what is different become readable as the same — and what other forms of the same Eigenzeiten would become visible if these conditions were altered?

Diagnosis itself thereby becomes theoretically problematic.

Diagnosis necessarily asks at the level of the individual person:

Which traits are present?

The model developed here asks instead:

Why does this Eigenzeit become readable as autism at precisely this boundary?

That is not the same question.

And it may not be solvable through increasingly fine-grained diagnosis alone, because even better diagnosis initially continues to search for signs in the present individual.

It still attempts to recognize migration in the migrant.

A morphogenetic theory, by contrast, would have to recognize that what we call autism may become visible where something between Eigenzeit and Raster remains incommensurable.

This difference is not simply "the autism."

It is a boundary phenomenon under which different, non-identical formations can be brought together.

If, however, we continue searching for a common object that must supposedly lie behind this visibility, we may be forcing precisely that blur which we seek to eliminate through increasingly fine measurement.

If we search for autism, we force blur.

This produces a possible paradox of scientific precision.

Causal resolution and ontological resolution need not increase in the same direction.

A genetic, neural, or sensory factor can be determined with ever greater precision while it simultaneously becomes less clear which operatoric position it occupies within that form in which the visible difference becomes relevant at all.

The more precisely the isolated element is measured, the more easily the relation can disappear within which this element does anything determinate at all.

Research can see all the things correctly and still miss the displacement if that displacement lies not in the things, but in their relation.

The more sharply we focus on the supposed object, the more easily the relational geometry disappears within which it becomes autism at all.

It may therefore be impossible to bring "the autism" into sharp focus precisely because the attempt already presupposes that a common object must lie behind the shared visibility.

The model allows for another possibility.

Different world-relations can imply a similar form of non-coincidence at the same Raster-boundary without therefore possessing the same internal structure.

Autism in this sense might be neither a unified hidden structure nor merely the sum of different causal factors.

It would be a category under which different Eigenzeit-curvatures are brought together where their relation to a dominant Raster permits the same representational closure.

The commonality would then not necessarily lie in the persons. It would lie partly in the boundary at which their difference is made visible.

Research searches for the thing where perhaps only the boundary becomes visible. This answer, unsatisfying to some, could nevertheless represent an important political opening for those affected. They would be taken seriously in their experience, not in their correspondence.

The paper does not claim to provide a final ontology of autism. It offers an operatoric model that may help explain why biological, developmental, experiential, and diagnostic findings can remain mutually non-identical while still becoming legible within a shared category.

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AuDHD as a Boundary Case of Non-Stabilizable Cognition

On the Crisis of Categorical Models in Neurodivergence Research

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Abstract:

This paper develops a theoretical perspective on AuDHD (autism and ADHD) that moves beyond prevailing models of comorbidity and differential classification. Rather than treating AuDHD as an additive or hybrid category within existing diagnostic systems, it is understood as a boundary case at which the categorical foundations of these systems themselves become unstable.

Starting from the observation that AuDHD can neither be consistently typologized nor stably described in functional terms, the paper argues that this instability does not constitute a deficit, but points to a fundamental property of cognition: its non-stabilizability. Cognitive processes are thus not conceived as the processing of stable representations, but as dynamic relations emerging from a structural difference—a "gap"—that cannot, in principle, be fully closed.

Within this framework, AuDHD appears as a liminal configuration in which this difference can no longer be smoothed out or functionally subsumed by neuronormative models. This makes visible that existing cognitive and diagnostic frameworks are systematically oriented toward stabilization and, in doing so, exclude precisely those forms of cognition that evade or structurally undermine such stabilization.

The paper therefore proposes not to establish AuDHD as a new category, but to understand it as an epistemic boundary case at which the very premises of such categorization become questionable. In this sense, a revision of fundamental assumptions about cognition, identity, and normality becomes necessary. Neurodivergence thus appears not as a variation within a stably conceived system, but as a necessary component of a dynamic cognitive field.

This paper is conceived as a supplementary text to the previously published book *They Cannot Understand: Why Autism Research Gets It Wrong* (DOI: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19035961) and further elaborates its theoretical premises in the context of the current AuDHD debate.

AuDHD is thus not primarily explained, but made visible as a boundary case at which the necessity of stabilizing models itself is called into question.

Keywords: AuDHD, autism, ADHD, neurodivergence, cognition, non-stabilizable cognition, liminality, enactive cognition, epistemology, cognitive science

1. Introduction

Current research on AuDHD, as of 2026, still largely operates within two paradigms: clinical classification and experience-based description. While the former attempts to translate autism and ADHD into additive or overlapping categories, the latter describes subjective experiential spaces, mostly without fundamentally questioning the underlying cognitive models.

This gives rise to a tension in which the question of a third group within the spectrum emerges almost inevitably. This implicit categorization within autism and neurodivergence research is historically predictable. Whenever autism research reaches its limits, it tends either to introduce another subgroup or to loosen the overarching category, for example by transforming it into a spectrum.

These attempts at ontological control result from the necessities of clinical paradigms and scientific habits grounded in representable or objectifiable categories. A central question thus arises: what justifies the introduction of a new category when the existing one could equally be expanded—and what legitimizes the loosening of the existing category when a new label is simultaneously available as an option?

There appears to be no truly plausible answer to this question that is itself made transparent as part of the decision-making processes within research. Yet this lack of transparency repeatedly constitutes the core of research errors, particularly in the fields of neurodivergence and cognition.

For whichever path is chosen here fundamentally shapes subsequent knowledge.

It must be noted that research in this domain develops almost exclusively in blocks of extension, renewal, or loosening, and more rarely through entirely new discoveries from fundamentally different directions. Each new category or label is therefore inevitably distorted by the context of what already exists. In this sense, the spectrum built upon the incompleteness of Asperger's concept, and AuDHD upon the unresolved relation between autism and ADHD. If it is to develop into an independent category, it would first have to detach itself from an identification based on the mere addition of ADHD and autism.

While symptoms of both conditions appear recognizable, mechanisms that do not belong to either are thereby systematically underestimated.

Had AuDHD been approached along a different path of research, it would likely have received a different name, and the phenomenon would not be reconstructed from the perspective of the symptomatology of ADHD and autism. Indications of this can be found in the history of individuals who did not fit—those described as eccentric, geniuses, artists, highly gifted, or simply "different." Each time and culture developed its own terms for such deviations, depending on the extent to which they could be integrated. In the past, the Church held interpretive authority. Today, psychiatry does.

With colonization, Catholicism, and capitalism, the points of rupture shifted at which the friction between norm and deviation became visible as a problem demanding explanation. In modern Western societies, this task was first assigned to psychiatric science and later to neuroscience, displacing cultural practices, shamanistic systems, and other collective modes of interpreting neurodivergence.

A central feature of such classifications is that they initially appear to fit—much like prejudices appear to fit. Yet they do not suffice, in Spinoza's sense, to grasp the substance, but remain bound to their function within a particular discipline.

Is research thus caught in a trap of categorization? Perhaps.

What becomes evident, at the very least, is why autism research would need to open itself to other disciplines and approaches. Its history is marked by a series of categorization errors. The issue is not merely that someone with a hammer sees nails everywhere, but how everything can be turned into a nail—and what this does to what was not one before.

AuDHD may represent precisely such a rupture—a boundary case that inevitably leads to the question of whether the "nail" might be something else entirely.

AuDHD has so far resisted a stable description that could be established independently of ADHD and autism. It appears to be neither an "either/or" nor a "both/and," but rather a "neither/nor"—a phenomenon that calls into question more fundamental assumptions: whether cognition can be understood as a category of fixed objects (neurological, biological), or whether it is better conceived as a boundary phenomenon—a form of liminality whose fundamental nature lies not in determinability, but in openness.

AuDHD would then reveal the limits of the determinability of autism and ADHD, rather than constituting yet another block of stabilization.

This very openness is often experienced by those affected as an incommensurable, difficult-to-grasp shift in perception, as a distorted positioning, as a form of non-functional communication. One may therefore not only ask what causes such shifts, but why shifts exist at all. Do they have a function?

One possible approach arises when such shifts are understood not as external disturbances but as structural moments. Much like overtones in a sound, which do not add themselves to the tone but emerge from its structure and make it differentiable in the first place, deviation here appears not as a foreign element, but as a difference generated within the system itself.

This perspective dissolves the question of a cause in the sense that it is no longer something that produces distortion, but that distortion itself becomes necessary for anything to appear as form. Neurodivergence would then not be the consequence of something, but a requirement of any stabilization.

The origin would thus lie not primarily in genetics, but in the normative itself. The normative would not merely evaluate deviation, but produce it. Neurodivergence would therefore not be a thing in itself, but a boundary phenomenon that takes shape along the conditions of the norm—as a necessary difference without which stability itself could not arise.

This paper begins at this boundary. It does not ask what AuDHD "is," but why it resists existing forms of description. The thesis is that AuDHD cannot be understood as a special case within an otherwise functioning model, but as an indication that the model itself is not merely insufficient, but grounded in an assumption that necessarily distorts the phenomenon —namely, that cognition can be described along the categories of autism and ADHD.

The aim is therefore not to relocate AuDHD into another field, but to open the field in which it is situated at the level of its categories.

2. Critique of Existing Models

The dominant models of cognition underlying autism and ADHD research operate—most often implicitly—within an ontology of stable states. Cognition appears within these models as a regulable process whose aim is the production of coherent, predictable, and functionally utilizable phenomena. This logic is deeply inscribed in the history of science, from the mechanistic models of early modernity through cybernetics to contemporary concepts of information processing and predictive coding.

Already at this point, a structural narrowing becomes evident: what counts as cognition is bound to the possibility of stabilizing, measuring, and reproducing states. This epistemic precondition usually remains invisible, because it coincides with the methodological requirements of the respective discipline and thus establishes itself as self-evident. Stability thereby appears not as a specific perspective, but as an implicit condition of knowledge itself.

Within this framework, neurodivergent phenomena are necessarily read as deviation. Not because they are inherently deficient, but because they evade stabilization. Diagnosis then appears as an act of translation: a dynamic, non-linear phenomenon is converted into a set of properties that can be placed within existing categories. What is lost in this process is not only complexity, but precisely that dynamic which gives rise to the phenomenon in the first place.

At this point, a proximity becomes visible to what has been discussed in philosophy as the problem of representation. From Spinoza's critique of inadequate ideas through Kant's transcendental conditions of experience to Whitehead's process philosophy, a line can be

traced that indicates that what appears as an object is the result of a particular form of abstraction—and not its precondition. The stabilization of the object is thus not neutral, but already an intervention.

In the context of neurodivergence, this means that the categories "autism," "ADHD," and increasingly also "AuDHD" are not neutral descriptions, but epistemic condensations that depend on stability. They are functional within a system oriented toward diagnosis, intervention, and control, yet lose explanatory power as soon as the underlying dynamic itself becomes the object of inquiry. In this sense, they reproduce the phenomenon less than they translate it into a form that remains compatible with the system.

In this context, AuDHD does not mark a marginal area, but a rupture. It points to the limit of a model that treats cognition as an object, although it may only be graspable as relation. What is at stake here is therefore not merely the inadequate description of a phenomenon, but the very precondition of its description.

This inadequacy is not accidental, but structurally determined. Categories fail in the face of phenomena such as AuDHD not because these are particularly complex, but because they presuppose a stability that cognition, in this form, cannot provide.

3. Theoretical Shift

At this point, a shift in perspective may become necessary—one that does not merely introduce new categories, but calls into question the conditions of categorization themselves.

Cognition is no longer understood here as the processing of stable representations, but as a dynamic process emerging from a fundamental difference. This difference—following the ontology developed in *The Physics of the Poor*—can be described as a "gap": a structural non-coincidence between potential and actual form that cannot, in principle, be fully closed.

The gap does not designate a private concept, but a structural condition that can be observed wherever stabilization produces irreducible difference.

This gap is essential to the understanding of consciousness itself—and thus also to phenomena such as neurodivergence.

The gap is not a deficiency, but the condition of perception, cognition, and existence. It generates movement, differentiation, and relation. Stability, in this model, does not appear as a goal or fundamental state, but as a temporary fixation within an open field—as a local condensation of a process that is fundamentally non-stabilizable.

In the tradition of Varela and Maturana, this could initially be described as an enactive dynamics in which cognition is not localized in the brain, but arises in the interplay between organism and environment. Yet while enactive approaches often continue to aim at coherence, self-organization, and operational closure, the approach proposed here shifts the focus toward the principled non-closure of these processes.

Cognition thus no longer appears as a system that stabilizes itself, but as an event that produces stabilization only temporarily and, in doing so, necessarily generates displacements and distortions—in the sense of a shift of being (Seinsverschiebung), in which potential and form cannot be brought into coincidence.

This displacement is not to be understood as an error or disturbance, but as a structural consequence of stabilization itself. Wherever order condenses, differences necessarily emerge that can no longer be integrated into that order. Boundary phenomena such as dissonances are, in this sense, not exceptions, but expressions of this structural tension.

As long as stabilization remains the goal, these dissonances cannot be resolved, but only displaced, covered over, or recoded. To the extent that normative orders condense, the production of such boundary phenomena increases.

Boundary phenomena do not arise despite stabilization, but from it.

Cognition thus operates not within stable states, but along those points of rupture that stabilization itself produces.

The gap therefore does not designate merely an epistemic limit, but an ontological structure. It marks the point at which every objectification remains necessarily incomplete and every representation constitutes a reduction. Cognition is, in this sense, not the closing of this gap, but the ongoing operation within it—and precisely therein its condition of relation to reality.

A fully stabilized cognition would, under these conditions, no longer be cognition, but simulation, and would thereby lose its relation to reality. It would no longer be oriented toward an open reality, but only toward the reproduction of its own states.

An open rupture can appear as something whole on an under-complex reflective surface—not because it is whole, but because the rupture cannot be represented. In this way, the representability of what AuDHD signifies is necessarily limited within clinical observation.

Without the gap, cognition remains in pure simulation of itself. If we consider the perspective from which autism and ADHD are often approached in research, we can identify an underlying tendency: cognition is positively framed as predictability, while rupture, dysfunction, confusion, and lack of fit are framed negatively.

The normative must, at all costs, be preserved as such.

Yet cognition would not be functional if it were linearly predictable and fully self-contained. Reality would then be nothing more than simulation of self-reference—a closed, inert, and determined system.

This insight extends beyond a mere call for diversity. It concerns the question of what can be recognized within a given epistemic framework—and whether every such framework has the legitimacy, or even the right, to name as simple what it can only represent in simplified form.

Cognition thus has a requirement, and this requirement is often not acknowledged as such within cognitive research on autism, ADHD, and AuDHD. If it were acknowledged, more adequate criteria would have to be applied—criteria that do not treat the gap as a problem. For in a liminal phenomenon, measurement cannot operate in the same way as in a stable system.

From this perspective, autism and ADHD appear less as explanations than as attempts to stabilize something that cannot, structurally, be stabilized. If autism and ADHD did not exist, they would have to be invented—not necessarily because humans require them as such, but because the system requires what they indicate: a rupture in the simulation capacity of cognition.

At this point, diagnostics enters its current crisis. The more it narrows and operationalizes its categories, the more clearly it comes into conflict with forms of lived reality that cannot be stably typologized.

It becomes apparent that individuals can experience rupture, liminality, and the incommensurability of neurodivergent states without being recognized as autistic or as having ADHD, because diagnostic attribution primarily responds to manifest structures, not to the underlying relational affinity of boundary phenomena.

Diagnostics captures the surface, not the generative dynamic from which it emerges. It searches for a thing, not for a boundary experience.

Humans possess many capacities. Some are oriented toward manual, pragmatic, mathematical, or artistic domains. Neurodivergent individuals exhibit different affordances and are equipped with different forms of embodiment. Why, then, should it not be equally necessary that there are individuals whose cognition operates closer to openness and rupture than to the operable zone of a normative that appears transferable to all?

The issue here is not the recognition of further variants, but the allowance of deviation without the necessity of its categorical reattachment to the normative.

In autism research today, it is rarely evident that conclusions about the relation of normative society to reality are drawn from autism. Instead, autism is treated as something external—as a foreign body. Yet boundary phenomena stand in a direct relation to the norm. As the norm condenses, the production of such boundary phenomena increases.

4. AuDHD as a Liminal Boudary Case

In this context, AuDHD cannot be understood merely as a combination of two disorders—that is, as something resting on a supposedly secure foundation—but as a liminal configuration in which the stabilization of cognitive differences itself becomes precarious.

Autism and ADHD may appear here as symptomatics, as expressions along a field that becomes visible under the term AuDHD. At the same time, AuDHD does not consist of

them, but points to a phenomenon that precedes these condensations, before it takes form within neuronal, cultural, or medical categories.

Precisely for this reason, AuDHD appears less graspable—not because it is insufficiently researched or less impactful for those affected, but because, as a boundary phenomenon, it is structurally disadvantaged in becoming visible. It resists description not accidentally, but systematically—insofar as it does not appear as a stable object, but as the condition of difference itself—and for that very reason cannot appear without being misrecognized.

In this sense, the focus of neurodivergence research shifts: it is no longer the classification of deviation that stands at the center, but the question of the conditions under which deviation appears as such in the first place. This makes visible that neurodivergence cannot be understood solely within existing models, but touches upon their very preconditions.

Neurodivergence thus no longer appears as an object of research, but as a boundary phenomenon at which the reach and limitation of research itself are decided.

This also shifts the relation between research and experience: no longer is experience measured against categories, but categories against experience.

There are further indications that neurodivergence is internally more complexly interwoven. Observations that ADHD medication, for example, can intensify autistic manifestations suggest that this is less a matter of additive effects than of displacements within a shared dynamic field. Likewise, it is questionable whether autism masks ADHD or vice versa; rather, what appears is a shift within a shared field, not a covering-over that would presuppose autism and ADHD as stable entities. What becomes visible here is not a higher-order category, but an invariance from which ruptures emerge that at times reflect more autism, at times more ADHD, without being reducible to either.

One might also ask whether autism and ADHD are not projections of a society attempting to banish the gap that threatens its own conception of "normal cognition." Modern society can hardly afford to let the liminal stand as such, as is evident in the fact that much of research still rarely focuses on improving living conditions, but rather on clarifying deviation from the norm, up to and including its remediation. One attempts to eliminate a disorder without accepting its necessity—the necessity implied by the norm itself.

The fundamental error lies in assuming that order must be closed in order to be real. In fact, the norm is real only because it implies deviation. Cognition cannot develop without deviant structural patterns. This deviation is not a disturbance within order, but the condition of its possibility. Without it, the norm would lose its own reality and collapse into pure self-reference.

The contradictions frequently described in neurodivergent individuals—between a need for structure and impulsivity, between sensory hypersensitivity and sensation-seeking, between focus and dispersion—do not appear here as additive effects, but as fluctuations of a non-integrability within a boundary experience.

What is at stake is not incompleteness or deficit, but a form that cannot be translated into a coherent order without being misrecognized. It is not something that has not yet come to fit, but something that cannot fit.

The concept of healing presupposes that an order has been damaged. A boundary experience, however, is not a defective whole, but the condition for the possibility of boundary itself.

This dynamic is not only theoretically describable, but experientially accessible. It manifests as a state in which perception, thought, and action no longer align in a stable manner, but shift against one another. What is expected as coherent cognition begins to slide.

This sliding is not a mere failure, but escapes voluntary stabilization. It marks the point at which the expectation of coherence can no longer be fulfilled without distorting the underlying dynamic.

This sliding is not simply a breakdown of order, but a state in which order itself becomes unstable. Meanings shift, transitions lose their determinacy, and even simple actions may escape their own logic. It is a state in which the fit between world and perception does not break, but dissolves without transitioning into a new stability.

What emerges here is not chaos, but a form of liminality that can be described neither as dysfunction nor as an alternative order. It is a field of experience in which cognition does not fail, but exposes itself to its own non-closure.

AuDHD is thus neither "autism plus ADHD" nor a third stable type. It describes rather a condition in which the attempts at classification become visibly untenable. This failure is not accidental, but points to the limits of a model that understands cognition exclusively as a stabilizable structure.

AuDHD therefore does not stand at the end of a developmental trajectory, but within a series of attempts to grasp a phenomenon that is defined precisely by its resistance to being grasped. It is a boundary case at which the difference between model and phenomenon can no longer be concealed.

In this sense, autism and ADHD are less explanations than condensations—attempts to capture something that cannot be reconstructed in causal-linear terms. The error lies in assuming that this indeterminacy disappears by embedding it within ever finer formats that only make sense within the logic of existing categories.

This can be illustrated by another example:
People can be angry for a wide variety of reasons. If anger is framed as a pathological category, forms of anger can be classified. If categories of categories are then constructed, anger appears increasingly explainable—without revealing what actually produces the specific moment. Causes can be categorized, but not the concrete situation without which anger cannot exist. Categorization is thus often mistaken for understanding; it frequently marks the preliminary stage of simulation.

If cognition were fully rational, representational, and predictable, it would no longer stand in relation to a complex reality. Simulation stands in tension with reality insofar as it replaces its openness. If cognition is not to be simulation, it must remain incomplete. Its relation to reality consists precisely in not possessing a finished model of it, but in operating within a continuously liminal state.

If this state is a condition of relation to reality, then cognition must also produce forms that operate closer to this liminality—forms that are incommensurable and exhibit significant gaps. Forgetfulness is not a failure of the system in this sense, nor is dreaming an evolutionary error—and neither are autism and ADHD.

Yet when research turns to neurodivergence, it continues to rely on a model of cognition as a computer. What this overlooks is that such a model excludes precisely those ruptures and gaps that are necessary for cognition to exist as a reality-bound process.

This becomes visible in another central aspect: Eigenzeit.
Within the field of neurodivergence, Eigenzeit plays a crucial role—the relation to what is real because it is embodied and experientially accessible. Eigenzeit fundamentally resists categorization and signifies an appropriation of the moment by the individual. This becomes a rupture with the normalized world and at the same time remains a component of relation to reality itself.

Research must recognize where the desire for regulation encounters the right to Eigenzeit, to one's own relation to the world—and must step back at that point. The central question is then no longer what individuals are, but what they require.

5. Epistemic Function

If AuDHD is understood in this sense, its epistemic function shifts fundamentally. It is no longer primarily an object of explanation, but itself becomes a medium of knowledge.

The impossibility of classifying AuDHD in a stable way exposes the implicit assumptions of research. It shows that the orientation toward stability is not a neutral methodological choice, but an ontological setting that renders certain forms of cognition visible while systematically excluding others.

In this sense, AuDHD functions as an epistemic disruptor. It interrupts the self-evidence of existing models and compels a reflection not only on their limits, but on their structure. It does not merely show that there are "other" forms of cognition, but that what counts as "cognition" at all depends on specific perspectives, operations, and exclusions.

It thus becomes evident that the liminal experience described above must not be understood as an exception, but as an indication of a more general structure. What becomes visible in AuDHD is not only a boundary case, but a condition that is systematically excluded within stability-oriented models.

AuDHD thus makes visible that knowledge cannot be conceived independently of its conditions. It points to the fact that categories are not simply found, but produced—and that in doing so they necessarily reduce, stabilize, and select. In this sense, models appear less as representations of reality than as operative interventions into it.

This shift has consequences beyond the field of neurodivergence. It concerns fundamental questions of epistemology: How do categories emerge? What role does stability play in the description of the world? And what happens when such stability cannot be presupposed—or proves not to be universally attainable?

6. Political Dimension

The perspective proposed here is not without political implications. For the orientation toward stable states is not only an epistemic, but at the same time a normative setting.

Modern institutions—from the labor system to law and education—are based on the assumption that subjects are capable of realizing stable, predictable, and controllable states. This assumption is not a neutral description, but a structural precondition of their functioning. Deviations from it are therefore not simply observed, but marked as a problem that must be corrected, compensated for, or excluded.

If, however, cognition itself is not fundamentally stable, but grounded in a dynamic difference, then these norms lose their claim to universality. They appear as specific expressions of a particular relation to the world—one oriented toward stabilization, predictability, and control—but not as general conditions of human existence.

In this context, neurodivergence is not merely a variation within a given system, but a necessary perspective through which the limits of these norms become visible. It shows that what counts as "functional" is bound to preconditions that are neither self-evident nor universally attainable. In this sense, it becomes clear that the category of functionality itself is the result of specific epistemic and institutional decisions.

The question thus shifts from the integration of deviation within existing structures to the transformation of the conditions under which deviation appears as such in the first place. The focus is no longer primarily on the adaptation of the individual, but on the structure of an order that privileges certain forms of cognition while systematically marginalizing others.

AuDHD does not first have to become AuDHD in order to be real, nor to grant those affected a right to recognition and existence. It does not have to submit to clinical order in order to be able to make claims upon society. For whatever it is, it is also a product of the necessity of the normative not being able to fully recognize itself. There will always remain that which is questionable. What is truly questionable is the compulsion to reformat it into the known.

One may demand that it be known more precisely in order to become "concrete," but one must not fall into the illusion that this would constitute the basis of its existence—or even a resolution of the anxiety toward ambiguity.

Those affected by what we call AuDHD can claim their right to existence even without a label—not as a defined category, but as an unresolved disturbance of relations, which at the same time constitutes a fundamental precondition of established order.

Without neurodivergence, there is no neurotypicality. The question of support or recognition for those affected by neurodivergence does not derive from their presumed deficits, nor from the measurement of compensation required to integrate them into the normative. Rather, it follows from the distribution of resources along the question of those who materially sustain the conditions of existence.

On whose shoulders does the world rest? Ontologically, it rests equally on the shoulders of the neurodivergent. Those who sustain the boundary experience cannot, within a humane society, be excluded from the advantages of stabilization. Anything else would amount to exploitation.

7. Conclusion

AuDHD is not introduced in this paper as a new category, but is used as a boundary case in order to question the preconditions of cognitive models. The analysis suggests that stability is not a fundamental property of cognition, but the result of specific epistemic and institutional settings.

By making these settings visible, AuDHD opens the possibility of understanding cognition as a dynamic field that cannot be fully stabilized. This perspective shifts the focus from classification to relation, from identity to difference, from control to openness—and thereby calls into question the very conditions under which knowledge about cognition can be constituted.

The aim is not to replace existing categories, but to recognize their limits and to render them visible as such. In this sense, AuDHD marks less a new form of neurodivergence than a point at which the question of cognition itself must be posed anew.

This shift concerns not only the object of research, but also its perspective: from the search for stable descriptions toward an engagement with the conditions of its own possibility.

In this context, it also becomes clear that cognition cannot be understood independently of the Eigenzeit in which it unfolds. That which cannot be stabilized does not evade knowledge, but points to a form of relation to reality that is accessible only within the respective experience itself.

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Neurodivergence and the Geometry of Masking: A Three-Dimensional Field Model of Incommensurability, Morphogenetic Pressure, and Compatibility Work

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Abstract

Masking is predominantly described in current autism and neurodivergence research as a psychological and behavioural phenomenon: as a conscious or unconscious adaptation to social expectations, the intensity of which is often captured through camouflaging, subjective effort, exhaustion, identity conflicts, or burnout. This perspective has made important experiences of neurodivergent people visible, but largely leaves open **which structural conditions generate masking in the first place and why outwardly similar forms of masking can have qualitatively different causes and consequences**. In particular, it remains unclear why neurodivergent people frequently show high masking scores without this allowing the conclusion that masking is fundamentally a specifically neurodivergent or necessarily exhausting activity.

The present paper therefore develops, building on a general theory of competing relevance orders, a **spatial field model of masking**. Masking is understood here not primarily as a property or strategy of a person, but as form-building and compatibility work within a multidimensional social space in which different world-bindings, relevance orders, and normative rasters encounter one another. What is decisive, therefore, is not only *how strongly* a person masks, but **within which structural constellation masking emerges**. The proposed model distinguishes in particular between the structural distance or possible incommensurability of the relevance orders involved, the asymmetry of the required translation work, and operative viability or resonance within the respective field.

On this basis, the hypothesis is developed that at least part of particularly pronounced neurodivergent masking cannot be adequately explained by pressure to conform, stigma avoidance, or strategic self-presentation. In certain neurodivergent constellations, masking may instead emerge from a deeper structural non-coincidence between different forms of

perceptual, attentional, meaning-related, and world-organisational structure. The concept of **incommensurability** is introduced here explicitly as a **relational theoretical dimension** and not as a universally established property of neurodivergent existence. It designates a possible degree of structural non-coincidence between world-bindings, the form, depth, and situational significance of which may vary considerably across different neurodivergent profiles.

At the same time, the field model makes it possible to differentiate between different masking generators. Strategic, stigma-induced, role-related, and incommensurability-induced masking can produce outwardly similar forms of behaviour even though the underlying relations differ. Exhaustion, intensity, and duration are therefore not understood as defining properties of masking, but as possible **consequence variables of the respective field constellation**. High energy expenditure indicates how costly a particular compatibility operation is, but identifies neither its generator nor the structure that makes this operation necessary.

This shift also changes the understanding of *unmasking*. A reduction in subjective burden does not have to mean that a supposedly original or authentic identity has been uncovered beneath a social mask. It may equally result from a change in the relational field: expectations are modified, translation work is taken over by other participants, Eigenzeiten are made possible, or normative rasters are opened. Unmasking can therefore be understood as a **reorganisation and redistribution of compatibility work and morphogenetic pressure** (Speed 2026a), without the underlying difference between world-bindings necessarily disappearing.

The proposed model thus shifts the central research question from *How strongly does a person mask?* to *Within what space must this person operate, which non-neutralisable differences encounter one another there, and who carries the work of their social compatibilisation?* From this perspective, neurodivergent masking appears not merely as a particularly intensive variant of general adaptive behaviour, but as a possible limit case in which the spatial and relational structure of masking becomes particularly clearly visible. The paper therefore proposes a connection between neurodivergence research, relational ontology, and a theory of social fields, and opens an approach to investigating masking not only psychologically, but **geometrically, relationally, and structurally**.

Keywords: Neurodivergence, autistic masking, camouflaging, unmasking, relational field theory, masking field, structural distance, incommensurability, compatibility work, translation work, morphogenetic pressure, operative viability, field depth, field density, field persistence, relevance orders, world-binding, relational ontology, social legibility, visibility logic, diagnostic double bind, neurotype matching, masking generators, institutional masking, stigma-induced masking, strategic masking, raster justice, co-formation, Double Empathy Problem, Forced Neurotypical Identity Work

1. Introduction

Masking has by now become one of the central concepts in autism and neurodivergence research. It generally refers to conscious or unconscious forms of social adaptation through which neurodivergent people modulate behaviours, forms of expression, or reactions so that they become compatible, inconspicuous, or socially legible within neurotypically shaped environments. This research has contributed substantially to making visible experiences that had long been overlooked: permanent self-monitoring, the learning of social scripts, the suppression of certain behaviours, the burden of social adaptation, as well as possible connections with exhaustion, burnout, or identity conflicts.

Despite these advances, a fundamental theoretical problem remains. Masking is predominantly described as a process **within the person**. The person adapts, compensates, conceals, imitates, or regulates themselves. Even where social norms and stigmatisation are taken into account, the analytical starting point often remains subject-centred. The social environment appears as a context that triggers or reinforces masking, but not as part of a shared structural constellation within which masking first takes form.

This perspective leads to a second reduction. Masking is often recognised through its consequences: high subjective effort, exhaustion, social overload, burnout, or the loss of a self experienced as authentic. This easily creates the impression that particularly intensive or particularly exhausting masking is at the same time particularly characteristic of neurodivergent or autistic existence. Yet the decisive question remains unanswered: **What exactly is being measured here?** High energy expenditure can indicate that a particular social operation is costly. But it does not yet say which structural relation generates these costs.

One could therefore confuse the symptom with the cause and then fail to recognise the cause when the symptom changes. Masking among neurodivergent people can also have different causes at different times.

This becomes particularly clear once masking is considered beyond neurodivergence. People also mask at work, within class and gender orders, under conditions of poverty, stigmatisation, institutional dependency, or social insecurity. Artists translate their work into institutionally usable formats; scientists move between epistemic interests and career logics; employees regulate affect and expression; members of marginalised groups learn to make themselves legible in relation to dominant cultural expectations. Outwardly, such processes may resemble neurodivergent masking. It does not follow from this, however, that their **generative structure** is identical.

One could even ask here where neurodivergent masking among autistic people or people with ADHD begins and where they, too, are merely masking "conventionally."

The perspective developed here begins from this difference. It does not primarily ask how strongly a person masks, but **within which structural space the necessity of masking arises**. The starting point is the assumption that social interaction does not take place merely between individual subjects, but between different relevance orders, world-bindings, and

rasters of perception, evaluation, and action. These orders determine which differences receive attention, which meanings are taken as self-evident, which actions appear compatible, and which forms of coherence are produced.

Under these conditions, masking can be understood as work that becomes necessary where several such orders act simultaneously upon the same person, situation, or form of life and are not readily compatible with one another. The decisive variable would therefore not be the visible mask itself, but the **position within a relational field**: How great is the structural distance between the orders involved? How one-sidedly is the necessary translation work distributed? And under what conditions can the person concerned maintain their own world-binding within this field?

Such a spatial perspective could in particular explain why neurodivergent people frequently show high masking scores without understanding neurodivergent masking simply as a particularly intensive form of general social performance. One possible theoretical explanation is that, in certain neurodivergent constellations, it is not merely different interests or roles that compete with one another, but deeper forms of perception, attention, meaning, and social organisation that are only partially translatable into one another. The concept of **incommensurability** is therefore used in what follows as a theoretical hypothesis. It does not designate a universally established property assumed to apply to all neurodivergent people, but a possible degree of structural non-coincidence between different forms of world-organisation.

This qualification is particularly important. Neurodivergence does not designate a uniform cognitive or ontological profile. Different autistic, ADHD-related, or combined constellations can differ substantially with regard to perception, sociality, temporal structure, sensory processing, attention, and world-binding. A spatial model therefore need not eliminate this heterogeneity, but rather make it **representable**. Incommensurability would not be a binary category within it, but a possible dimension within a larger field.

The paper therefore pursues three interconnected aims. First, masking is described as a spatial-relational field phenomenon rather than exclusively as a psychological property. Second, different **generators of masking** are distinguished in order not to equate strategic, stigma-induced, role-related, and possibly incommensurability-induced forms through shared surface features. Third, the widespread opposition between masking and unmasking is reconsidered. If masking emerges from a relational field structure, a reduction in masking costs does not have to mean that an original self has been uncovered. It may equally express a change in the field and a different distribution of the necessary compatibility work.

The aim is therefore not a further individualisation of neurodivergent adaptation work. On the contrary: the proposed model shifts the analytical focus away from the question of **why a person does not fit effortlessly into an existing raster** toward the question of **which rasters encounter one another here, how strongly they overlap, and who bears the costs of their non-coincidence**.

A further question is whether masking has so far been partly **neurotypically overinterpreted**, by transferring motives and functional logics of neurotypical social adaptation onto neurodivergent processes. In particular, the interpretation of masking as primarily socially motivated adaptation often presupposes that belonging, social conformity, or the optimisation of one's own impression constitutes the central driving force. For at least some autistic experiences, however, this may fall short. What appears from the outside as social adaptation may equally arise from the necessity of establishing compatibility at all between differently organised relevance orders. In this case, the observed behaviour would not primarily be an expression of a desire for conformity, but the result of a translation operation whose generator lies in the structural non-coincidence between person and social field. The danger therefore lies in explaining neurodivergently generated forms of social compatibilisation through neurotypical categories of impression management, belonging motivation, or conformity behaviour, and thereby missing their actual relational mechanism.

Recent masking research increasingly shows that masking cannot adequately be understood as an exclusively individual or intrapsychic phenomenon.

The present paper is not designed as a systematic review of the masking literature. The proposed model was developed from an ongoing theoretical body of work on neurodivergence, world-binding, relevance orders, and masking. External literature is therefore drawn upon selectively where it establishes central points of departure, provides empirical points of connection, or enables the model to be differentiated from existing approaches. The argument does not follow a linear derivation from the state of research, but a theory-led synthesis that is subsequently brought into relation with existing and more recent findings.

The conception of what masking might actually be is currently changing substantially.

Current work points to its context-dependence, its relational emergence within mixed-neurotype interactions, and its institutional production through social and professional ordering systems. What has so far largely been missing, however, is a model of the **relational structure itself**: a model that does not merely establish that context and relationship matter, but describes which properties of these relations generate different forms of masking. The present paper proposes such a model. It conceptualises masking as position and movement within a multidimensional field determined by structural distance, the asymmetry of compatibility work, and the operative viability of the world-bindings involved.

Masking thereby becomes less recognisable as a property of the person and more as a property of shared world-binding. This makes it possible to draw conclusions about the extent to which neurodivergent world-experience diverges from neurotypical world-experience.

The translation back from the masking of the individual to the basic conditions of a society can substantially help to design living environments for neurodivergent people with lower energy expenditure.

2. From the Psychological to the Spatial Model of Masking

Conventional masking research usually begins with observable or reported adaptive performances. It examines whether a person makes eye contact, uses social scripts, changes forms of expression, suppresses certain behaviours, consciously analyses social situations, or attempts to appear less conspicuous outwardly. This perspective is empirically understandable, but remains incomplete at one decisive point: it primarily describes what a person does, but not which structural situation gives rise to this doing.

A general theory of masking (Speed 2026d) already suggests that adaptation alone does not adequately explain the process. Masking emerges where different relevance orders must be stabilised simultaneously. Relevance orders structure what attention is directed towards, which differences acquire significance, which forms of coherence are preferred, and which actions appear meaningful within a situation. The decisive question thereby shifts from the individual capacity for adaptation to the relation between the orders involved.

This shift can be conceived spatially.

A psychological model locates masking predominantly within the person. A spatial model, by contrast, locates it between positions within a field. The person is not simply situated in an environment to which they adapt more or less successfully. Rather, within a concrete situation, several forms of world-binding encounter one another, generating different priorities, temporalities, expectations, and forms of social legibility.

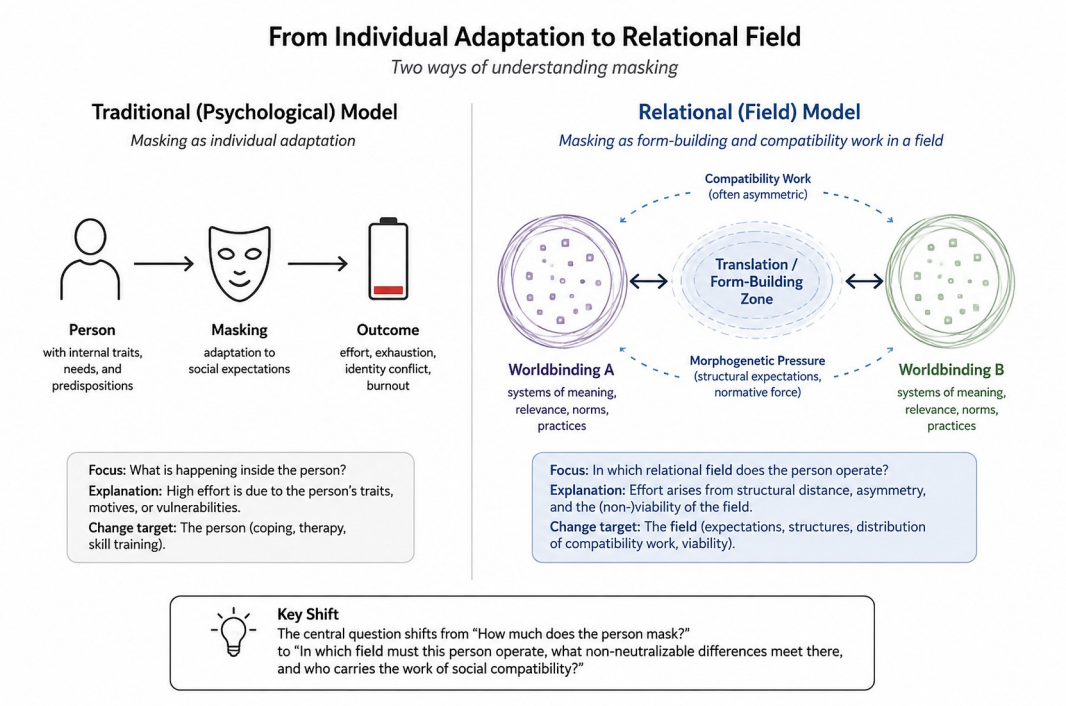
This changes the object of analysis.

No longer only:

Person → adaptive performance → burden

but:

World-binding A ↔translation and form-building zone ↔World-binding B


From Individual Adaptation to Relational Field
Two ways of understanding masking
Traditional (Psychological) Model
Masking as individual adaptation
Person
with internal traits, needs, and predispositions
Masking
adaptation to social expectations
Outcome
effort, exhaustion, identity conflict, burnout
Focus: What is happening inside the person?
Explanation: High effort is due to the person's traits, motives, or vulnerabilities.
Change target: The person (coping, therapy, skill training).
Relational (Field) Model
Masking as form-building and compatibility work in a field
Compatibility Work
(often asymmetric)
Translation / Form-Building Zone
Morphogenetic Pressure
(structural expectations, normative force)
Worldbinding A
systems of meaning, relevance, norms, practices
Worldbinding B
systems of meaning, relevance, norms, practices
Focus: In which relational field does the person operate?
Explanation: Effort arises from structural distance, asymmetry, and the (non-)viability of the field.
Change target: The field (expectations, structures, distribution of compatibility work, viability).
Key Shift
The central question shifts from "How much does the person mask?"
to "In which field must this person operate, what non-neutralizable differences meet there, and who carries the work of social compatibility?"

Masking, in this model, designates the operative work within this intermediate zone. It emerges where different orders do not fully merge into one another, but at the same time must remain capable of acting within a shared situation. The previously developed concept of morphogenetic pressure describes precisely this constellation: a difference that cannot be fully neutralised generates further need for form-building. This pressure is not a psychological property of an individual, but a property of the relation between different world-bindings. (Speed 2026d,c,b,a)

Such a shift from the individual to the relation is now beginning to become visible within current masking research as well. Lacarte (2026) conceptualises autistic masking in the workplace context no longer primarily as an individual coping or camouflaging strategy, but as a relational and ontological phenomenon. On the basis of interviews with 38 autistic adults and 14 people in intermediary workplace roles, she describes masking as *ontological modulation*: as the ongoing modulation of communication, affect, embodiment, and relational orientation within work environments structured by ideas of professionalism, productivity, and neurotypical communication. The possibility of belonging often depends on maintaining institutional legibility, but can change when communicative expectations are renegotiated.

This development is of particular significance for the model proposed here. It shows that the theoretical movement away from an exclusively intrapsychic description of masking has already begun independently. The spatial model connects with this relational shift, but goes one step further. It asks not only how masking is produced within a social assemblage, but about the **geometry of this relation itself**: How great is the structural distance between the relevance orders involved? How asymmetrically is the necessary compatibility work distributed? And to what extent can one's own world-binding remain operatively viable

within this relation? From this perspective, *ontological modulation* can be understood as one possible process within a broader masking field, without equating the two concepts.

The spatial representation is more than a mere metaphor. It makes it possible to distinguish between different variables that often collapse into one another in psychological models of masking. A person may, for example, move within a field in which the relevance orders involved are relatively similar, while social sanctions are high. Another person may be situated in an environment with little sanctioning, but operate between relevance orders that possess only limited structural overlap. Both situations can generate masking, although their generator and operative structure differ considerably.

The frequently asked question of authenticity in the context of masking changes fundamentally once masking is conceived spatially and relationally. Authenticity would then not be exclusively the result of an individual decision to pretend "more" or "less," but could equally depend on the structure of the field within which a self becomes experienceable and legible at all. In a space of low structural contrast, certain forms of action can appear immediate, self-evident, and therefore authentic precisely because there is little present that makes their selectivity visible. What is experienced as one's "own" or "natural" self may therefore partly be an effect of low relational difference.

Only where a clearly different world-binding, relevance order, or form of social legibility enters the field can properties become visible that had remained unmarked within a more homogeneous field. From this perspective, authenticity would not necessarily be the uncovering of an already fully given self, but also a **contrast effect of social spaces**. Just as different varieties of apples may initially appear simply as variants of the same "real apple" until a pear is introduced and differences thereby become visible that had previously disappeared into the shared background, a self may likewise only recognise certain structures of its own as such through contact with a more foreign order.

> This does not mean that authenticity is arbitrary or unreal. Rather, it means that the experience of authenticity itself is relationally co-produced: a field can render differences invisible, intensify them, or bring them forth as differences in the first place. **We experience ourselves as authentic not only because we are "ourselves," but partly also because the space around us has not yet generated sufficient contrast against which the contingency of this self could become visible.**

The model proposes three initially analytically separated dimensions.

2.1 Structural Distance

The first dimension designates the degree of correspondence or non-correspondence between the relevance orders involved.

At one end are situations of high structural overlap. The participants orient themselves largely toward the same social meanings, priorities, or forms of communication. Masking can nevertheless occur here, for example for strategic reasons, because of fear, or because of social sanctions.

At the other end are constellations in which the orders involved structure the same situation in clearly different ways. What appears self-evidently relevant to one side may be secondary to the other; what functions for one side as polite social synchronisation may appear to the other as a semantically underdetermined or information-poor process.

This dimension is referred to in what follows as **structural distance**.

A possible limit region of high structural distance can be modelled as **incommensurability**. This does not mean that communication between the people involved would be impossible. Nor is it claimed that neurodivergent and neurotypical people live in completely separate realities. Rather, incommensurability designates the theoretical possibility that certain relevance orders do not allow lossless or immediate translation into one another.

Incommensurability is therefore explicitly used as a **gradual theoretical construct**. It may be strongly pronounced in certain autistic or other neurodivergent constellations, weaker in others, or almost irrelevant to a concrete situation. The model therefore presupposes neither a uniform neurodivergent world architecture nor a universal ontological difference.

2.2 Asymmetry of Compatibility Work

Structural distance alone does not yet explain why masking can become burdensome or violent. Different world-bindings can coexist without one side being permanently forced to move closer to the other.

A second dimension is therefore decisive: **Who carries the work of compatibilisation?**

In a relatively symmetrical field, several participants mutually adapt their communication, expectations, and actions. Difference remains, but is worked through jointly.

In an asymmetrical field, by contrast, one relevance order is presupposed as self-evident. The person whose world-binding diverges from it must translate, explain, anticipate, alter their temporal structure, control expression, or direct their own attention toward differences that do not possess comparable priority within their original relevance order. It is precisely at this point that difference becomes a power relation.

The general theory of masking (Speed 2026d) already describes this structure as an asymmetrical distribution of morphogenetic pressure: the dominant order does not have to make its own blind spots visible, while the divergent side takes over the necessary translation and compatibility work. The more successfully this work is carried out, the less visible it becomes.

From a spatial perspective, a field with great structural distance can therefore remain entirely stable, provided that compatibility work is distributed with sufficient reciprocity. Conversely, even moderate difference can generate high masking costs when the entire burden of adaptation is permanently assigned to only one side.

2.3 Operative Viability and Resonance

A third dimension concerns the question of **what the required compatibility work does to one's own world-binding**.

Masking is not necessarily destructive. Earlier works have already distinguished between forms in which masking consumes energy as permanent forced translation work and forms in which relational mediation can generate new forms, possibilities for action, or even energy. Productive masking presupposes that the field responds at least partially to the difference introduced and enables co-creation. Where this possibility is completely absent, masking can tip into structural forced labour. (Speed 2026f)

The third axis therefore does not simply designate well-being or stress. It describes the **operative viability of one's own world-binding within the field**.

A field of high viability allows one's own relevance structures to be maintained while simultaneously entering into relation with other orders. Translation may alter both sides.

A field of low viability, by contrast, demands continuous compatibility without allowing one's own world-binding to be sustained as an independent order. The person remains socially functional but must increasingly redirect resources into a foreign relevance structure.

It is precisely here that it becomes visible why exhaustion should be treated as analytically **secondary**. It is a possible consequence of an unfavourable position in the field, not the defining characteristic of masking itself.

For example, an artist might develop themselves as an artistic persona who, within a self-created job, optimises the conditions of their own existence. This would be masking and at the same time an "authentic" position that supplies energy rather than consuming it. There are domains in which masking roles are, as it were, permitted and established. They even become formative elements of a society that thereby produces innovations by allowing people to think and live themselves anew and differently.

2.4 Masking as a Position in the Field

From the three dimensions, a simple spatial basic model emerges:

structural distance × asymmetry of compatibility work × operative viability

Masking can take different forms within this space. Two people can obtain the same value on a conventional masking scale and nevertheless occupy entirely different positions.

One person might experience low structural distance but high social sanctioning and therefore control their behaviour intensively.

Another might experience low sanctioning but have to translate continuously between relevance orders that lie far apart.

A third might, despite great difference, be situated within a highly reciprocal environment in which their own world-binding is not suppressed but productively taken up.

The psychological surface feature "masking" is not sufficient to distinguish these constellations from one another.

For neurodivergence in particular, this spatial extension could be decisive. High masking scores would then not have to mean that neurodivergent people are fundamentally more inclined toward pretence or try especially intensely to appear neurotypical. They could indicate that some neurodivergent people more frequently occupy **field positions of high structural distance and high asymmetrical compatibility demands**.

This hypothesis fundamentally changes the research question.

Not:

Why do neurodivergent people mask so strongly?

But:

Within which social spaces do they move, how great is the non-coincidence of the relevance orders involved there, and how is the work distributed that makes this non-coincidence manageable?

The masking field thus makes visible what a purely psychological model registers only as individual burden: the **geometry of the relation** from which this burden emerges.

3. Not All Masking Is the Same: A Typology of Generators

If masking is understood as work within a relational field, it is no longer sufficient to subsume different phenomena under a common umbrella term. What becomes decisive instead is the question of which generator gives rise to the respective masking operation. Two people may display outwardly similar adaptive performances and yet act within entirely different structural situations.

This distinction is necessary because the generalisation of the concept of masking could otherwise easily tip into a trivial statement: everyone masks, therefore neurodivergent masking is merely a particularly intensive variant of ordinary social adaptation. Such a

conclusion, however, would obscure precisely those structural differences that a spatial theory is intended to make visible.

The general theory of masking has already shown that masking occurs far beyond neurodivergence. Artists translate between aesthetic and economic orders, scientists between knowledge and institution, people living in poverty between lived reality and administrative legibility, activists between social experience and political language. Neurodivergent people, in turn, translate between different forms of social and cognitive organisation. What these cases share is that several world-bindings must be stabilised simultaneously.

Commonality of the basic mechanism does not, however, mean identity of its causes.

3.1 Strategic Masking

A first form can be described as strategic masking. The people involved fundamentally move within a largely shared relevance order, but modulate their behaviour because certain forms of social presentation are more advantageous than others.

An employee may, for example, signal agreement to a superior although internally disagreeing. An applicant may present self-confidence although feeling insecure. People may alter their language, clothing, gestures, or emotional reactions in order to secure status, recognition, or access to resources.

The decisive point is that no deep structural non-coincidence between the world-bindings involved is necessarily present here. The social game is fundamentally understood. Masking concerns primarily positioning within a largely shared game.

Strategic masking can nevertheless be considerably burdensome. Continuous self-control, hierarchical dependency, or competition can generate high energy expenditure. Precisely for this reason, exhaustion must not be used as a criterion of distinction. A person masking strategically may be more exhausted than a neurodivergent person in a favourable relational field, without both performing the same form of masking.

3.2 Protective and Stigma-Induced Masking

A second form arises not primarily from strategic advantage, but from protection against sanction.

People conceal characteristics, behaviours, affiliations, or needs because their visibility could produce social, occupational, or institutional disadvantages. This includes numerous forms of stigma management, closeting, or controlled self-presentation.

The generator here lies in the difference between an existing characteristic or form of life and a social order that sanctions its visibility.

This form, too, may outwardly resemble neurodivergent masking. Behaviour is controlled, certain information is withheld, forms of expression are adapted, social situations are anticipated. Yet the central operation consists initially in concealment in relation to a sanctioning order.

The field model makes visible here that structural distance and social danger are not identical. Two relevance orders may lie relatively close to one another while a single characteristic is nevertheless massively sanctioned. Conversely, there may be great distance between two world-bindings without this immediately resulting in stigmatisation.

3.3 Role-Related and Institutional Masking

A third form arises where people must simultaneously maintain several partially contradictory roles or institutional requirements.

The General Theory (Speed 2026d) has elaborated this structure particularly in work, science, and poverty. People must not only act, but simultaneously produce an institutionally legible version of their actions. Activities must be documented, justified, quantified, or translated into existing categories. Not infrequently, the production of institutional visibility consumes more resources than the underlying activity itself.

Here, masking becomes a second level of work.

One does not only work.

One must additionally show that one is working.

One does not only conduct research.

One must translate research into institutionally usable forms.

One does not only live under conditions of poverty.

One must produce an administrative version of this life for authorities.

This form of masking emerges from competition between different relevance orders and can therefore involve high structural distance. It does not, however, have to be neurodivergent. Rather, it shows that modern institutions themselves generate masking by being able to process only certain forms of reality.

The General Theory accordingly describes masking as a technology of social legibility: societies and institutions must reduce complexity, form categories, and prioritise certain differences. This necessary stabilisation becomes problematic where it forgets its own selectivity and appears as reality itself.

3.4 Incommensurability-Induced Masking as a Theoretical Hypothesis

A fourth form may be particularly relevant to certain neurodivergent constellations. It is referred to here as incommensurability-induced masking.

The primary issue here is not to conceal a behaviour, convincingly perform a role, or strategically fulfil institutional expectations. Rather, the masking operation may arise because the relevance orders involved organise the same situation in structurally different ways.

A conversation, for example, may appear to one person primarily as a process of social synchronisation, while to another it may appear more strongly as an exchange of substantive information. An institutional deadline may represent merely an organisational marker within one order, while within another world-binding it competes with a multiplicity of real relations, tasks, and Eigenzeiten. An implicit social signal may automatically possess high relevance for one person, while another directs their attention toward different differences.

The thesis proposed here does not presuppose a binary separation according to which neurodivergent and neurotypical people each belong to a uniform, internally closed world. Rather, it stands in continuity with the assumption developed in *They Cannot Understand* that structural non-coincidences and partial incommensurabilities can arise between different forms of neurodivergent and neurotypical world-formation that cannot be fully dissolved through learning, communication, or adaptation. These differences are, however, neither equally pronounced in all neurodivergent people nor reducible to a uniform "neurodivergent world." Incommensurability therefore does not designate a rigid boundary between two groups here, but a relational property of certain encounters between different world-bindings, whose depth, form, and operative significance can vary.

For the present field model, this already theoretically developed incommensurability is therefore operationalised not as a binary group property, but as a variable relational dimension.

In certain neurodivergent constellations, the structural distance between relevance orders may become so great that social compatibility cannot be produced through simple behavioural adaptation. The person must then generate an additional interface: analyse situations, reconstruct meanings, simulate other priorities, or stabilise several relevance systems simultaneously.

Masking would in this case be less a form of concealment than a generative translation operation.

This possibility stands in continuity with earlier works in which neurodivergent masking was described as a boundary process between different forms of world-relation and not merely as a psychological adaptation strategy.

The difference from strategic masking would be fundamental.

In strategic masking, the situation is approximately:

I know the order and alter my presentation within this order.

In incommensurability-induced masking, it may be:

My own relevance order does not automatically generate the form that is compatible within this field; therefore, an additional form must be produced.

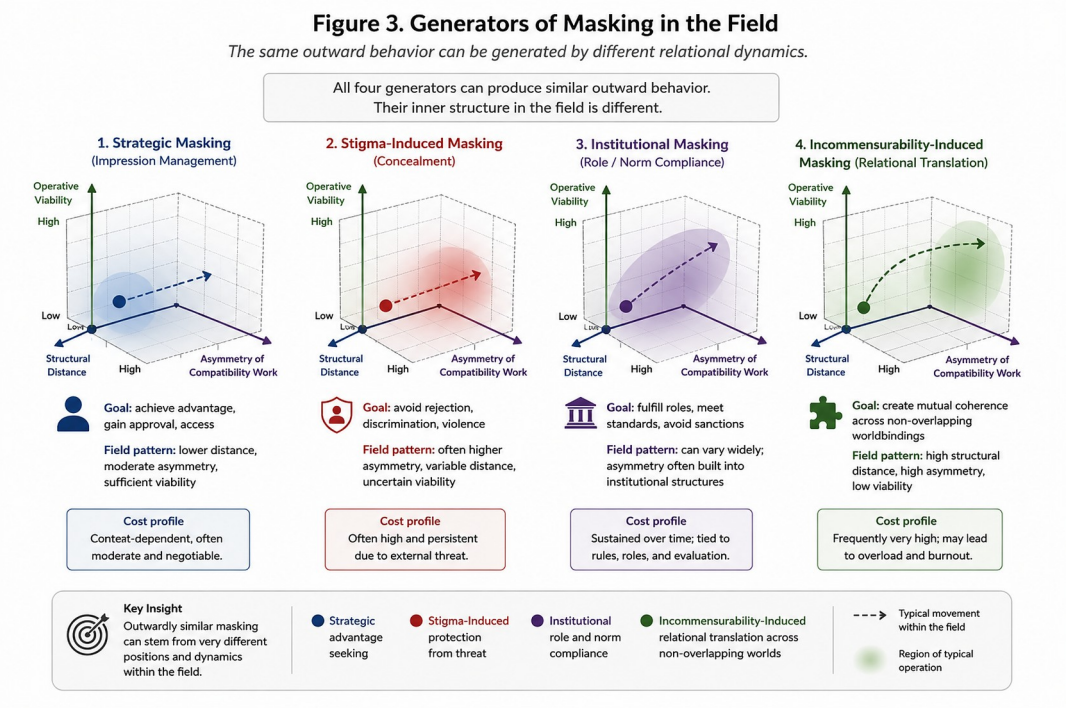


Figure 3. Generators of Masking in the Field
The same outward behavior can be generated by different relational dynamics.
All four generators can produce similar outward behavior.
Their inner structure in the field is different.
1. Strategic Masking
(Impression Management)
2. Stigma-Induced Masking
(Concealment)
3. Institutional Masking
(Role / Norm Compliance)
4. Incommensurability-Induced Masking (Relational Translation)
Operative Viability
High
Low
Structural Distance
Asymmetry of Compatibility Work
Goal: achieve advantage, gain approval, access
Field pattern: lower distance, moderate asymmetry, sufficient viability
Goal: avoid rejection, discrimination, violence
Field pattern: often higher asymmetry, variable distance, uncertain viability
Goal: fulfill roles, meet standards, avoid sanctions
Field pattern: can vary widely; asymmetry often built into institutional structures
Goal: create mutual coherence across non-overlapping worldbindings
Field pattern: high structural distance, high asymmetry, low viability
Cost profile
Context-dependent, often moderate and negotiable.
Cost profile
Often high and persistent due to external threat.
Cost profile
Sustained over time; tied to rules, roles, and evaluation.
Cost profile
Frequently very high; may lead to overload and burnout.
Key Insight
Outwardly similar masking can stem from very different positions and dynamics within the field.
Strategic advantage seeking
Stigma-Induced protection from threat
Institutional role and norm compliance
Incommensurability-Induced relational translation across non-overlapping worlds
Typical movement within the field
Region of typical operation

3.5 Overlaps Rather Than Rigid Categories

This typology must not be understood as a classification system in which each person could be clearly assigned to one form. In real situations, the generators overlap.

An autistic person may simultaneously:

- experience structural non-coincidence,
- fear social sanction,
- strategically seek to secure career opportunities,
- have to fulfil institutional roles.

Likewise, a non-neurodivergent person may enter situations that generate considerable structural distance between their own relevance orders and institutional relevance orders.

The typology therefore serves not to diagnose persons, but to **analyse field constellations**.

It is precisely this multidimensionality that could explain why masking scales frequently capture high scores among neurodivergent people. A person may perform compatibility work simultaneously on several levels. Not only behaviour is regulated; at the same time, social codes may be reconstructed, sensory conditions compensated for, institutional

temporal structures processed, and one's own world-binding stabilised against foreign relevance orders.

A high masking score would then not be a simple expression of a particularly strong "mask." It could be the result of a **high density of overlapping masking generators within the same field**.

This distinction opens up a different interpretation of neurodivergent masking scores. Instead of asking why neurodivergent people apparently try particularly strongly to appear neurotypical, it would be necessary to investigate whether they more frequently operate within social spaces in which several forms of structural non-coincidence and asymmetrical compatibility demand occur simultaneously.

This does not abolish the particular relevance of neurodivergence, but specifies it more precisely.

Neurodivergent masking would not necessarily be particular because it is **more** masking.

It may be particular because the **geometry of the field** in which it emerges is different.

4. Why Exhaustion Does Not Define Masking

A central problem in current concepts of masking is that the structure of the phenomenon is often inferred from its costs. Masking becomes particularly visible where it becomes strenuous: in exhaustion, overload, burnout, identity conflicts, or social withdrawal. This easily produces a conceptual shift in which the consequences of masking become its defining properties.

This shift is understandable. Burden is empirically easier to capture than the structure of a relation. People can report how exhausted they are after social situations, how strongly they control their behaviour, or how often they use social scripts. Yet from this alone it cannot readily be inferred what kind of masking operation has taken place.

The general theory of competing relevance orders already suggests that energetic loss does not simply arise from adaptation itself. Adaptation can become partially automated through learning. What remains is the necessity of stabilising several relevance systems simultaneously that are not fully compatible with one another.

This makes it possible to formulate an important distinction:

Exhaustion measures the costs of a compatibility operation. It does not identify its generator.

This distinction is particularly relevant when different forms of masking are compared with one another.

A non-neurodivergent person may work for years within a highly hierarchical occupational field, continuously regulate emotions, avoid conflicts, display loyalty, and adapt their language. This form of strategic or institutional masking can be extremely exhausting.

A neurodivergent person, by contrast, may have automated certain social translation operations over decades to such an extent that they are situationally perceived with relatively little conscious effort. The structural difference may nevertheless persist.

If masking is measured exclusively through subjective effort, the first case could produce a higher masking score than the second. It would not follow from this, however, that the first person experiences the more complex or structurally deeper masking constellation.

4.1 Intensity and Structure

The same applies to intensity.

A high degree of visible adaptation does not automatically mean high structural distance. People can regulate themselves extremely strongly within a largely shared social raster. Conversely, a small visible change may presuppose a considerable translation operation.

The decisive variable is therefore not:

How strongly does observable behaviour change?

But:

How much structural mediation must take place for this behaviour to become socially compatible at all?

This difference is difficult to capture with conventional observational models.

A simple example would be eye contact. Two people can establish the same eye contact. For one person, it is part of a largely automatic social synchronisation. For the other, it may be an additional operation produced consciously or semi-automatically, which must be maintained in parallel with linguistic processing, sensory regulation, and situational analysis.

The visible action is identical.

The position within the masking field is not.

4.2 Automation Does Not Eliminate the Field Relation

A further reason for the limited explanatory value of exhaustion lies in the possibility of automation.

People learn.

Social scripts, professional roles, gaze behaviour, conversational patterns, or certain forms of self-presentation can require considerably less conscious attention over time.

From a psychological perspective, one might conclude from this that masking has decreased.

From the field perspective proposed here, however, it follows only that the costs of a particular operation have decreased.

The underlying relation can remain unchanged.

A person who speaks a foreign language almost effortlessly after decades is not thereby suddenly speaking their native language. The translation relation has changed because competence and automation have increased. The difference between the systems has not therefore necessarily disappeared.

Something similar may apply to certain forms of neurodivergent masking.

People with many years of experience in particular may possess highly developed social models. They recognise patterns, anticipate reactions, and possess extensive routines. Such competencies can make social situations considerably easier. They should not, however, automatically be interpreted as evidence that no structural difference remains.

This means, particularly in diagnostics, that the life situation of the person concerned must be brought much more strongly into the foreground. Masking ultimately cannot be understood independently of the field. But this requires very deep insight into a person's lived reality. Something that conventional diagnostics hardly provides.

If masking is then considered only along the question of exhaustion, essentially nothing significant has yet been understood.

4.3 Masking Can Consume Energy — or Generate It

A purely exhaustion-oriented theory encounters a further problem: under certain conditions, masking can not only consume energy but also become productive.

Earlier works (Speed 2026d,c,b,a) have described how masking, as relational form-building, can open up new possibilities in resonant contexts. Where the environment responds to the difference introduced and permits co-creation, translation work does not have to take place exclusively against one's own world-binding. It can proceed along its internal structure and thereby generate new forms.

This is a crucial difference.

If an autistic person can productively transform their specific mode of perception into art, science, writing, technology, or other forms, mediation between different relevance orders is still taking place. This mediation does not, however, necessarily have to be experienced as self-loss.

Masking can then become a productive boundary operation.

The relevant question is therefore not:

Does masking consume energy?

But:

In which direction is the form-building energy of the field channelled?

Is it used exclusively to maintain a foreign relevance order?

Or can it at the same time stabilise, extend, or render productive one's own world-binding?

The 3D model makes this distinction visible. Two situations may possess comparable structural distance but entirely different values on the dimension of operative viability.

4.4 Burnout as an Endpoint, Not a Definition

This distinction is also relevant to the interpretation of burnout.

If masking is defined primarily through exhaustion, a circular logic easily emerges:

Masking is that which exhausts.

High exhaustion indicates strong masking.

And burnout retrospectively confirms that the masking must have been real.

This makes functioning masking theoretically difficult to see.

Earlier work (Speed 2026a) has pointed to precisely this diagnostic problem: autistic competence, stability, or situational adaptability can be read as counter-evidence against autism, while autistic structure is regarded as "authentic" only where it becomes visible in overload or breakdown.

A field theory avoids this short circuit.

Within this model, burnout would not be evidence of masking, but a possible consequence of a particular combination:

- high structural distance
- high asymmetry
- low operative viability
- long duration

Under these conditions, a person may increasingly invest resources in stabilising a field that supports their own world-binding only to a limited extent.

Yet here, too, no linear determination should be assumed. Not every person in such a constellation develops burnout. Protective factors, social resources, autonomy, temporal conditions, and individual differences can significantly alter the development.

The model therefore describes risk spaces, not inevitable trajectories.

4.5 Consequences for Measurement Instruments

If this analysis is correct, masking questionnaires that predominantly capture frequency, effort, or exhaustion are insufficient for a structural theory.

An expanded instrument would have to distinguish at least four different questions from one another:

How often does behavioural modulation take place?

How high are its subjective or energetic costs?

What structural distance exists between the relevance orders involved?

How is the necessary compatibility work distributed among the participants?

In addition, there would be the question of operative viability:

Can the person simultaneously maintain their own world-binding within the situation concerned?

This would transform a one-dimensional masking scale into a field profile.

Such a profile could explain why two people with similar masking scores can have entirely different clinical, social, and biographical experiences.

At the same time, it could prevent neurodivergent masking from being defined through its pathology.

High masking scores would then no longer automatically be signs of stronger self-denial or greater psychological dysfunction.

They could instead indicate that a person is operating within a field of high structural distance, multiple relevance demands, or asymmetrical responsibility for translation.

This once again shifts the central question from: **How exhausted is the person by masking?** To: **Which structure generates the work whose costs we measure as exhaustion?**

5. Unmasking as a Field Shift Rather Than a Return to the "Authentic Self"

The widespread opposition between masking and unmasking often carries with it an implicit conception of authenticity. Masking appears as pretence, adaptation, or overformation; unmasking, by contrast, as a return to an actual, original, or unaltered self. This opposition is intuitively understandable, but theoretically problematic.

The general theory of masking (Speed 2026d) has already pointed out that neither masking nor unmasking removes the structural cause of the problem. As long as different relevance orders remain simultaneously effective, the underlying tension does not disappear. If masking is reduced, institutional, social, and economic demands remain; if masking is

perfected, the same differences are merely managed on a permanent basis. Both states remain responses to the same field constellation.

An important consequence follows from this: unmasking that is subjectively experienced as successful does not prove that a previously concealed original identity has been uncovered.

It initially proves something else:

The conditions of compatibility work have changed.

5.1 Relief Is Not the Same as Originality

For many neurodivergent people, unmasking can mean a very real and profound improvement. Less self-monitoring, more opportunities for withdrawal, more open communication, permitted stimming, altered working conditions, or a more understanding social environment can substantially reduce everyday costs. This experience should not be relativised.

Current research on unmasking initially confirms that this relief can be empirically real. Durben (2026) examined unmasking for the first time specifically as a phenomenon in its own right in a mixed-methods study with 14 interview participants and 214 survey participants, all autistic college students. The results show considerable differences in how easily and in which social contexts people are able to unmask. Unmasking was in part associated with lower burden and a greater sense of authenticity, but remained clearly dependent on social context, perceived acceptance, and the expected reactions of others. Particularly striking is that the frequency of unmasking varied across different relationships and social situations.

The problem arises only with the theoretical conclusion:

Because I feel better without certain adaptive performances, what now appears must be my original or actual self.

There is no necessary connection between these two statements.

From a field perspective, the same improvement can arise because at least one of the structural dimensions has changed:

- the distance between the relevance orders involved has decreased,
- compatibility work has been distributed more symmetrically,
- one's own world-binding has been given more space,
- certain demands have disappeared,
- or the field as a whole has become more resonant and operatively viable.

Energy loss can thereby decrease even though the fundamental difference between the world-bindings involved persists.

This is a decisive point. The reduction of friction must not automatically be confused with the restoration of a presumed original.

5.2 The Problem of the Original

The idea of unmasking often tacitly presupposes a model in which an authentic self exists first and is later overlaid by social adaptation.

The schema is then:

original self → social adaptation → mask

and therapeutically or politically:

remove mask → rediscover original self

This model is particularly difficult to sustain for a relational theory of neurodivergence.

Human beings do not emerge outside their social, material, and cultural relations. Language, gesture, self-understanding, routines, protective strategies, and forms of attention develop within concrete environments. After decades of social form-building, it cannot readily be determined which components of a person are "original" and which are "adapted."

Remarkably, this problem also becomes visible within empirical unmasking research itself. Durben initially defines unmasking explicitly as the conscious attempt to dismantle a mask developed over a longer period and to regain a more authentic form of self-presentation. At the same time, however, the interviews show that precisely this distinction was no longer clearly possible for some participants. Deeply ingrained masking repertoires could become automated to such an extent that their deconstruction appeared difficult to almost impossible, and even the question of which behaviours belong to the "true self" became uncertain.

Durben also refers to earlier qualitative findings according to which masking can become automated over time and some autistic people develop difficulties rediscovering alternative forms of action or even determining which of their behaviours they regard as authentic. This creates a theoretically interesting tension: research continues to describe unmasking in terms of an authentic or "true" self, while its own data show that the boundary between self and mask cannot readily be reconstructed biographically.

For the model proposed here, a weaker assumption is therefore sufficient. It need not be denied that people experience certain forms of their behaviour as more authentic than others. The only question is whether this permits an inference to an unchanged original state that had already been fully present beneath the mask.

Earlier works (Speed 2026b,c,d,g) have formulated this point more radically. There, masking is not described as a secondary layer over an unchanged self, but as a process of self- and world-formation. The thesis is precisely that no original state exists that is merely concealed.

For the spatial model developed here, however, this strong ontological thesis does not have to be assumed universally. The weaker and methodologically more cautious statement is sufficient:

From the experience of lower masking costs, one cannot infer the existence of an unchanged pre-social original.

The spatial model requires no theory of the "true self." It merely describes changes in the field relation.

5.3 Unmasking as a Redistribution of Morphogenetic Pressure

The concept of morphogenetic pressure allows a more precise description of what can happen during unmasking.

Morphogenetic pressure arises where different world-bindings remain simultaneously real and cannot be fully translated into one another. It therefore does not necessarily disappear through better communication or mutual understanding. Its form, and above all its distribution, can nevertheless change.

Let us take a highly simplified constellation. Before unmasking, the neurodivergent person carries almost the entire compatibility work:

ND world-binding → translation → dominant raster

The other side has to change its own expectations only minimally.

After a successful process of change, the relation can shift:

ND world-binding ↔ shared translation zone ↔ other raster

Partners learn not to read direct communication as rudeness. Employers alter temporal or communication structures. Friends accept withdrawal. Expectations become explicit. Sensory environments are changed.

There is now direct empirical support for such a relational interpretation. Cook, Crane, and Mandy (2024) examined, among 133 autistic adults, social situations in which interactions were experienced not as camouflaging but as "authentic-feeling socialising." The authors conclude that such experiences are best understood as an interpersonal process that depends on the actions of all people involved. Safe, accepting relationships played a role, as did self-acceptance and the possibility of communicating one's own needs openly.

Particularly relevant to the present model is the role of non-autistic interaction partners. Participants described it as helpful when these partners actively sought information about different communication styles and needs, reflected on their own mode of communication, and changed it where necessary—for example by communicating more explicitly or reducing reliance on nonverbal signals. The authors explicitly interpret these findings in the context of reciprocal communication differences and the Double Empathy Problem.

The reduction of masking can therefore also be explained without assuming that a person has merely removed an inner mask. What changes is also the distribution of relational work. The other side no longer remains unchanged while only the autistic person has to produce compatibility. Part of the translation work is taken over by the field itself.

The difference has not therefore necessarily disappeared.

But the work of dealing with it no longer lies exclusively with one person.

What is subjectively experienced as unmasking can therefore theoretically be understood as **Redistribution of Compatibility Work**: as a redistribution of the work through which different world-bindings become compatible with one another.

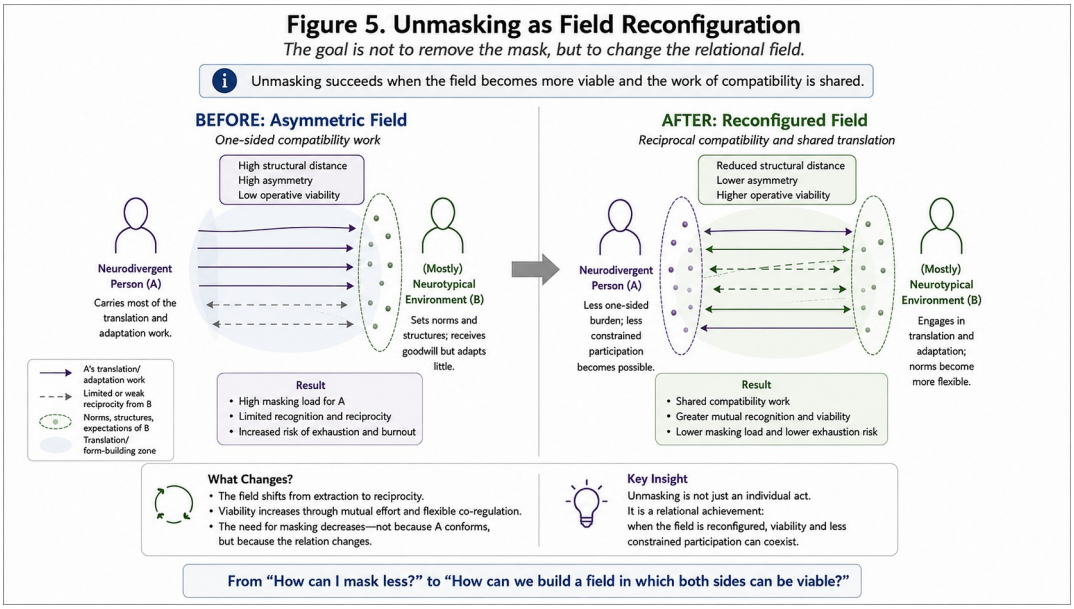


Figure 5. Unmasking as Field Reconfiguration
The goal is not to remove the mask, but to change the relational field.
Unmasking succeeds when the field becomes more viable and the work of compatibility is shared.
BEFORE: Asymmetric Field
One-sided compatibility work
High structural distance
High asymmetry
Low operative viability
Neurodivergent Person (A)
Carries most of the translation and adaptation work.
(Mostly) Neurotypical Environment (B)
Sets norms and structures; receives goodwill but adapts little.
A's translation/ adaptation work
Limited or weak reciprocity from B
Norms, structures, expectations of B
Translation/ form-building zone
Result
• High masking load for A
• Limited recognition and reciprocity
• Increased risk of exhaustion and burnout
AFTER: Reconfigured Field
Reciprocal compatibility and shared translation
Reduced structural distance
Lower asymmetry
Higher operative viability
Neurodivergent Person (A)
Less one-sided burden; less constrained participation becomes possible.
(Mostly) Neurotypical Environment (B)
Engages in translation and adaptation; norms become more flexible.
Result
• Shared compatibility work
• Greater mutual recognition and viability
• Lower masking load and lower exhaustion risk
What Changes?
• The field shifts from extraction to reciprocity.
• Viability increases through mutual effort and flexible co-regulation.
• The need for masking decreases—not because A conforms, but because the relation changes.
Key Insight
Unmasking is not just an individual act.
It is a relational achievement:
when the field is reconfigured, viability and less constrained participation can coexist.
From "How can I mask less?" to "How can we build a field in which both sides can be viable?"

This perspective makes it understandable why unmasking can be real, effective, and liberating at the same time, without requiring the assumption that an original self has been uncovered.

5.4 The Paradoxical Possibility of a "Masking of Unmasking"

Once unmasking becomes a culturally established concept, however, a further complication emerges.

A society does not only develop expectations of what "normal" behaviour should look like. It can likewise develop expectations of what an **authentically unmasked neurodivergent person** should look like.

Certain forms of expression can then become signs of successful unmasking: less eye contact, clearer boundary-setting, visible stimming, more direct language, withdrawal, open naming of sensory needs, or demonstrative rejection of certain social conventions.

These practices may be entirely meaningful. The problem does not lie in the practices themselves.

The theoretical point is rather: they too can become **socially legible forms**.

This gives rise to the paradoxical possibility of a:

Masking of Unmasking

The person no longer primarily orients themselves toward what a neurotypically legible self is supposed to look like, but toward how an "authentically neurodivergent" self is supposed to appear.

The field has changed.

But the logic of social legibility has not necessarily disappeared.

This possibility is particularly important because newer identity discourses, on the one hand, provide marginalised groups with concepts and visibility, but on the other hand can also generate new forms of categorisation. The General Theory (Speed 2026d) describes a similar effect: increased legibility can enable compatibility without removing the underlying morphogenetic pressure; it may merely reorganise it.

"Masking of Unmasking" should explicitly not be understood as an accusation of inauthenticity. It does not designate conscious performance.

Rather, it designates the fact that **forms of liberation, too, must take form within social fields**.

A neurodivergent person may genuinely feel relieved while at the same time adopting new cultural forms through which this relief is understood and communicated.

5.5 Autistic Self-Description Remains Epistemically Central

This critique of a simplified model of authenticity must not lead back into the old clinical structure in which outsiders explain to neurodivergent people that they misunderstand their own experience.

The subjective statement:

"Since I started unmasking, I feel better"

is an important empirical piece of information.

It describes a real change.

The field model merely adds a second analytical level:

Which change in the field made this relief possible?

Lived experience is therefore not devalued, but differentiated more precisely.

Experience provides information about the change in one's own situation. Theory investigates which structural mechanism might explain this change.

This is precisely where a spatial model has an advantage. It does not force a choice between:

either authentic or masked.

Instead, the same person can simultaneously:

- experience lower energetic costs,
- suppress less behaviour,
- continue mediating between different relevance orders,
- develop new social forms,
- and continue masking in certain situations.

This is not a contradiction.

It is a different position within the field.

5.6 Authenticity as Viability

This also allows the concept of authenticity to be reframed.

The General Theory (Speed 2026d) already proposes understanding authenticity not as the absence of masking or a return to an original self, but as the possibility of maintaining one's own world-binding without having to permanently justify or conceal its existence.

Within the spatial model, this idea can be specified more precisely.

Authenticity would then not be a position outside the masking field.

It would be **high operative viability within the field**.

A person can interact with other world-bindings, translate, take on roles, and alter forms without their own relevance order having to be permanently destroyed, displaced, or delegitimised in the process.

The opposition therefore shifts fundamentally:

Not:

Masking Authenticity↔

but:

asymmetrically enforced form-building work viable, reciprocal co-formation↔

The actual problem would then not be the existence of masks.

The problem would be a field order in which only certain people must constantly generate new forms so that the world of others can remain unchanged.

And it is precisely here that the analysis of unmasking returns to the political question of the entire model:

Who is allowed to live their world-binding as self-evident—and who must continuously translate it into another world?

6. Neurodivergence as a Particular Field Position

If masking is generally understood as work between competing relevance orders, the question arises again of what makes neurodivergent masking particular within this general model. The answer cannot simply be that neurodivergent people mask "more." Nor is it sufficient to point to greater exhaustion, more frequent social adaptation, or greater visibility of certain strategies.

The decisive difference may instead lie in how a person is positioned within the social field.

Within this model, neurodivergence would be neither a single property nor a uniform world architecture. Rather, it designates a group of constellations in which perception, attention, temporality, sensory processing, social synchronisation, or meaning-making may diverge to varying degrees from dominant institutional and social relevance orders.

The particular relevance of neurodivergence would then lie not in an isolated deficit, but in the possibility of a persistently increased structural distance from several dominant rasters at the same time.

Earlier works have already described neurodivergence as an analytical limit case of modern orders: conflicts do not necessarily arise there from an individual lack, but from structural incompatibilities between forms of intensive world-binding and the temporal, communicative, or stabilisation systems of institutions.

The spatial model extends this perspective.

6.1 Not One Difference, but Several at the Same Time

A neurodivergent person may simultaneously diverge from several dominant orders.

For example, with regard to:

- social synchronisation,
- distribution of attention,
- sensory priorities,
- temporal organisation,

- communicative explicitness,
- work rhythms,
- institutional self-organisation.

The decisive effect does not necessarily lie in each individual difference.

It may arise from their overlap.

A slight divergence on one dimension may generate hardly any masking. Several simultaneously active differences, however, can produce a field in which almost every social situation requires additional translation work.

This could explain why high masking scores among neurodivergent people do not necessarily have to be attributable to a single particularly strong adaptation strategy.

They could be the result of a high density of simultaneously operative non-coincidences.

6.2 Field Depth Rather Than Mere Masking Intensity

A further distinction suggests itself here: between masking intensity and field depth.

Masking intensity describes how strongly a person changes their behaviour.

Field depth, by contrast, describes how many levels of one's own world-binding must simultaneously be drawn into compatibility work.

A person may, for example, slightly alter their language without adapting their attention, temporal structure, or sensory organisation. The visible masking intensity may be relatively high, while field depth remains low.

Another person may change very little outwardly, but at the same time have to reconstruct conversational rules, control gaze behaviour, filter sensory stimuli, calculate implicit social meanings, and interrupt their own attentional movement.

The visible change may be small.

The field depth is high.

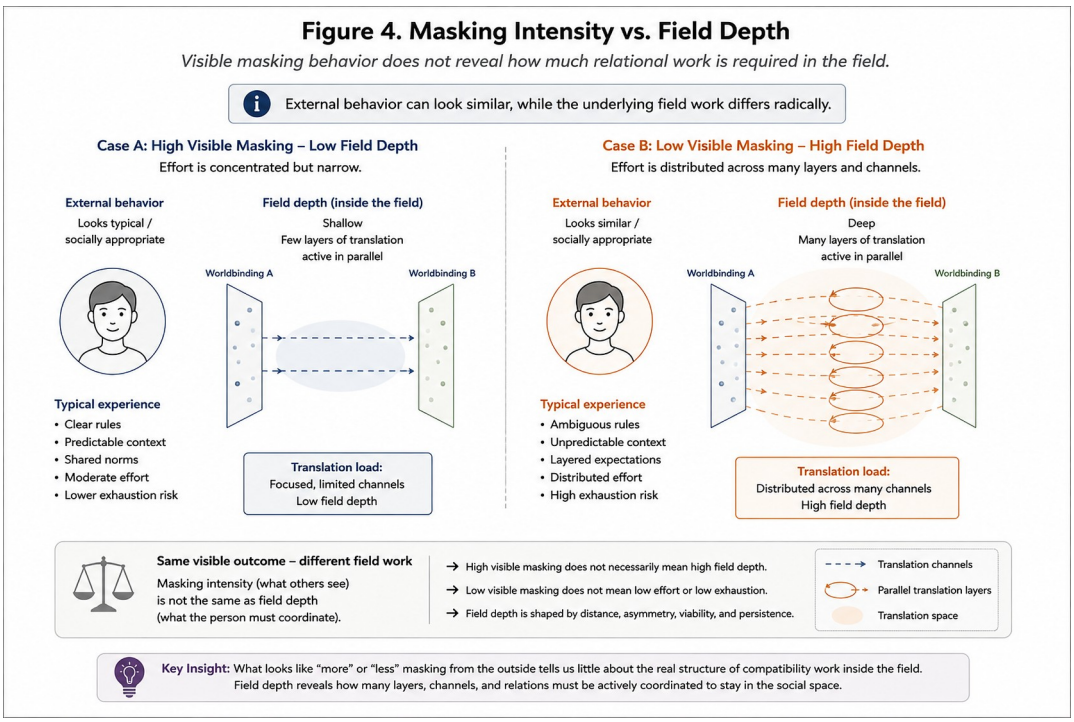


Figure 4. Masking Intensity vs. Field Depth
Visible masking behavior does not reveal how much relational work is required in the field.
External behavior can look similar, while the underlying field work differs radically.
Case A: High Visible Masking – Low Field Depth
Effort is concentrated but narrow.
External behavior
Looks typical / socially appropriate
Field depth (inside the field)
Shallow
Few layers of translation active in parallel
Worldbinding A
Worldbinding B
Typical experience
• Clear rules
• Predictable context
• Shared norms
• Moderate effort
• Lower exhaustion risk
Translation load:
Focused, limited channels
Low field depth
Case B: Low Visible Masking – High Field Depth
Effort is distributed across many layers and channels.
External behavior
Looks similar / socially appropriate
Field depth (inside the field)
Deep
Many layers of translation active in parallel
Worldbinding A
Worldbinding B
Typical experience
• Ambiguous rules
• Unpredictable context
• Layered expectations
• Distributed effort
• High exhaustion risk
Translation load:
Distributed across many channels
High field depth
Same visible outcome – different field work
Masking intensity (what others see) is not the same as field depth (what the person must coordinate).
→ High visible masking does not necessarily mean high field depth.
→ Low visible masking does not mean low effort or low exhaustion.
→ Field depth is shaped by distance, asymmetry, viability, and persistence.
Translation channels
Parallel translation layers
Translation space
Key Insight: What looks like "more" or "less" masking from the outside tells us little about the real structure of compatibility work inside the field. Field depth reveals how many layers, channels, and relations must be actively coordinated to stay in the social space.

This concept could help solve a central problem of classical masking measurement. Visible adaptation and subjective effort do not necessarily capture **how many levels of world-organisation are being mediated simultaneously.**

Neurodivergent masking may therefore be characterised less by maximum intensity than by high field depth.

6.3 The Hypothesis of Structural Incommensurability

At this point, the hypothesis of incommensurability acquires its specific function.

The concept designates a possible property of certain relations: two relevance orders may contain differences that cannot be fully translated into one another without parts of their respective internal logic being lost.

The General Theory already proposes that different world-bindings cannot be fully transferred into one another without partially losing their specificity, and that morphogenetic pressure arises precisely from this.

For neurodivergence, this now becomes an empirically open hypothesis:

Could certain neurodivergent profiles more frequently or more intensely enter relations of high structural non-coincidence than people whose relevance organisation overlaps more strongly with dominant social rasters?

This question is deliberately formulated cautiously.

It presupposes neither that all autistic people possess the same world-binding nor that all neurotypical people share the same order. It merely assumes that the distribution of certain relevance structures may not be random and that statistically different field positions may arise from this.

Recent dyadic research at least shows that neurotype and neurotype matching can meaningfully be investigated as properties of a **relation** rather than exclusively as characteristics of individual persons. Wolford (2025) had 20 autistic and 20 non-autistic adults interact with both same-neurotype and mixed-neurotype conversational partners, without participants knowing the neurotype of the person opposite them. Autistic participants reported higher overall masking and lower rapport; at the same time, the rapport ratings of the two conversational partners correlated with one another only within same-neurotype dyads. Wolford interprets the findings neither as clear confirmation of a deficit model nor as simple confirmation of the Double Empathy Problem and explicitly calls for a more differentiated investigation of the interaction between neurotype matching and masking.

For the model proposed here, precisely this ambiguity is relevant. The study does not prove structural incommensurability. It does, however, show that social quality and masking cannot be derived entirely from the neurotype of a single person. The **composition of the dyad** changes the relational structure within which communication and masking take place. This makes visible an empirical research logic that is fundamentally compatible with the assumption of a masking field.

6.4 Different Neurodivergent Profiles

A spatial model has the advantage that it does not have to homogenise neurodivergence.

Autistic, ADHD-related, and combined profiles could generate particular distances on different dimensions.

In an autistic constellation, for example, the difference might lie more strongly in the domain of social meaning-making, sensory organisation, or monotropic attention.

In ADHD, it might arise more strongly through temporality, stimulus selection, activation dynamics, or institutional rhythms.

In combined profiles, different tensions could overlap or partially compensate for one another.

These examples are to be understood as theoretical possibilities, not as a finished classification.

The decisive principle is:

Neurodivergence does not generate a single position within masking space. It changes the probability distribution of possible positions.

Heterogeneity therefore does not become a problem for the model, but its object.

6.5 The Dominant Raster Is Also a Field Position

A further consequence is decisive: the model must not treat the neurotypical order as a neutral zero point.

If neurodivergence is described as a position within the field, the same must apply to neurotypicality.

Dominant social rasters also possess specific relevance orders, temporalities, blind spots, and selection mechanisms. That they appear self-evident does not follow from their being structureless, but from institutions, communication norms, and social expectations being aligned with them.

The General Theory describes precisely this mechanism: a dominant order does not have to reflect upon its own blind spots; its selectivity appears as reality itself, while the costs of non-coincidence are attributed to those who diverge from it.

The 3D model should therefore contain no point simply labelled "normal."

It contains only different positions and an additional question:

Which position possesses institutional definitional power?

This is important because structural distance can be symmetrical while its social consequences are asymmetrical.

If an autistic and a neurotypical person have difficulty understanding one another, the distance is initially relational.

If, however, only the autistic person is diagnosed, trained, or therapeutically adapted, while the neurotypical mode of communication is treated as neutral, relational difference becomes an asymmetrical field order.

6.6 Why Neurodivergent Masking Scores Can Be High

This allows the paper's initial question to be reformulated.

Why do neurodivergent people frequently show high masking scores?

A spatial answer might be:

Not necessarily because they possess a stronger desire to pretend.

Not necessarily because they live less authentically.

And not necessarily because every individual masking operation is particularly strenuous.

But possibly because they statistically more often operate within fields in which several factors coincide:

greater structural distance + greater field depth + stronger institutional asymmetry + limited possibility of stabilising one's own relevance order.

Under such conditions, masking does not become an occasional behaviour.

It becomes the **infrastructure of social participation**.

That would be a fundamental difference.

A person who masks strategically in certain occupational situations can subsequently leave the corresponding field.

For a neurodivergent person, by contrast, the translation zone may encompass school, work, family, medicine, public authorities, and everyday communication at the same time.

Not because all these situations are identical.

But because the same person repeatedly encounters orders whose rasters are similarly attuned to certain forms of perception, temporality, or social legibility.

6.7 Neurodivergence as Making the Field Visible

Neurodivergence thereby acquires a particular epistemological function within a general theory of masking.

It is not simply a special case that disappears back into the general once the concept has been generalised.

Rather, neurodivergence may represent a **limit position** at which the structure of the entire masking field becomes particularly clearly visible.

What becomes openly apparent under conditions of high structural distance also exists in weaker form within other social relations: the necessity of translation, the selectivity of every raster, the asymmetrical distribution of compatibility work, and the limits of social legibility.

Neurodivergent experience therefore makes visible not only something about neurodivergence.

It makes visible **how social worlds are kept compatible with one another at all**.

That would be a decisive theoretical gain of the spatial model.

The question is then no longer merely what neurodivergent masking is supposed to be, but **what does neurodivergent masking reveal about the geometry of social reality itself?**

7. The Three-Dimensional Masking Field

The previous sections have separated three central dimensions from one another: structural distance, asymmetry of compatibility work, and operative viability. Taken together, they do not form merely a heuristic vocabulary, but can be represented as a spatial model.

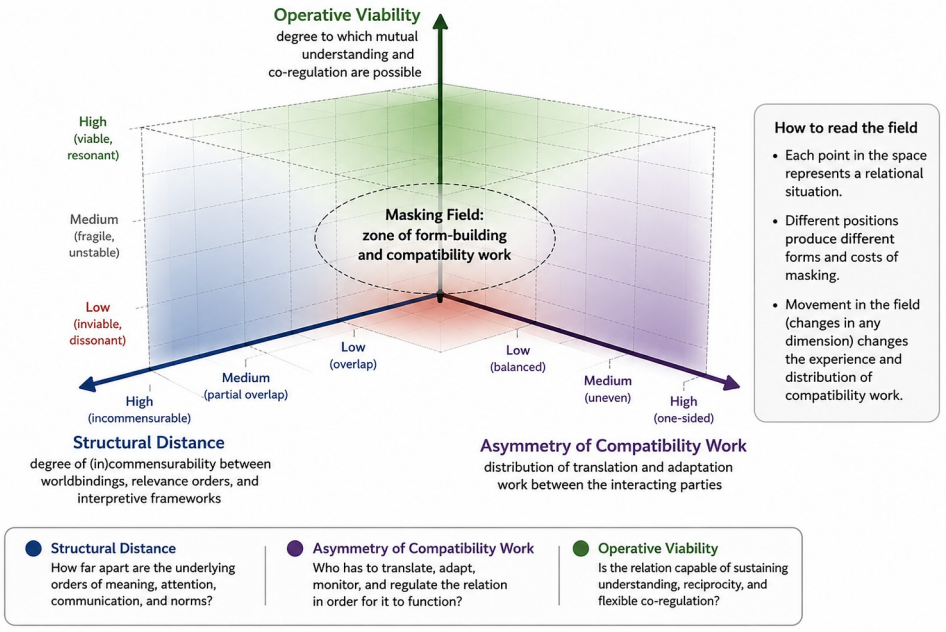
The purpose of this model is not to reduce social reality to three measurable variables. Nor is it claimed that masking actually exists within a Euclidean space. The three-dimensional space is an analytical model through which relational constellations can be made comparable that, within psychological concepts of masking, often appear only as individual states.

The decisive shift in perspective is:

Masking is not only something a person does. A person occupies a particular position within a masking field.

Figure 2. The Three-Dimensional Masking Field

Masking occurs within a relational space shaped by three structural dimensions.


Operative Viability
degree to which mutual understanding and co-regulation are possible
High (viable, resonant)
Medium (fragile, unstable)
Low (inviable, dissonant)
Masking Field: zone of form-building and compatibility work
High (incommensurable)
Medium (partial overlap)
Low (overlap)
Low (balanced)
Medium (uneven)
High (one-sided)
Structural Distance
degree of (in)commensurability between worldbindings, relevance orders, and interpretive frameworks
Asymmetry of Compatibility Work
distribution of translation and adaptation work between the interacting parties
How to read the field
• Each point in the space represents a relational situation.
• Different positions produce different forms and costs of masking.
• Movement in the field (changes in any dimension) changes the experience and distribution of compatibility work.
Structural Distance
How far apart are the underlying orders of meaning, attention, communication, and norms?
Asymmetry of Compatibility Work
Who has to translate, adapt, monitor, and regulate the relation in order for it to function?
Operative Viability
Is the relation capable of sustaining understanding, reciprocity, and flexible co-regulation?

7.1 The Three Axes

The first axis describes the **structural distance** between the relevance orders involved.

At the lower end, there is a high degree of overlap. The persons or systems involved prioritise largely similar differences, forms of communication, and forms of social coherence.

As distance increases, this immediate overlap decreases. The world-bindings involved increasingly organise the same situation in different ways.

At the theoretical limit, one can speak of **incommensurability**: not in the sense of complete unintelligibility, but as a state in which translation is possible only through loss, transformation, or additional form-building.

The second axis describes the **asymmetry of compatibility work**.

At one end, the necessary translation is largely carried jointly. Both sides modify expectations, forms of expression, or institutional structures.

At the other end, one order is taken as self-evident. The other side carries almost the entire task of producing compatibility.

The general theory has already described this asymmetry as the political core of masking: the dominant order does not have to reflect upon its own selectivities, while those whose world-binding diverges from it must translate, explain, compensate, and produce compatibility.

The third axis describes **operative viability**.

The question here is whether a person can maintain their own relevance order within the respective field.

High viability does not mean comfort or freedom from conflict. A person may experience great structural distance and nevertheless remain highly viable, productive, or creative if the field permits sufficient resonance and co-formation.

Low viability, by contrast, means that the stabilisation of the foreign order increasingly takes place at the expense of one's own world-binding.

This gives rise to three independent questions:

How far apart are the worlds?

Who has to work on this distance?

What happens to one's own world-binding in the process?

7.2 No Linear Masking Scale

The spatial representation makes visible why masking cannot meaningfully be represented along a single line from "little" to "much."

A one-dimensional scale could, for example, classify two people with a score of 80 out of 100 as strongly masking.

Within the three-dimensional model, however, they could occupy entirely different locations.

Person A:

- low structural distance,

- high adaptation asymmetry,
- relatively high viability.

Person B:

- high structural distance,
- high adaptation asymmetry,
- low viability.

The same masking score would have an entirely different meaning here.

In the first case, intensive self-control within a fundamentally familiar social order may be present.

In the second case, the person may have to translate several levels of their own perceptual and meaning organisation simultaneously.

This allows a fundamental methodological problem to be formulated:

An aggregated masking score can map different field geometries onto the same numerical value.

It may then measure the intensity of certain strategies without identifying the structural space within which these strategies arise.

7.3 Positions Rather Than Categories

The 3D model should therefore not be used to confine rigid masking types within separate boxes.

It is more useful to speak of **positions or regions of the field**.

Strategic masking would, for example, tend to lie within regions of lower structural distance.

Stigma-induced masking could occur at low or medium distance while at the same time being associated with high social asymmetry.

Institutional masking could show considerable differences along the distance axis depending on the situation.

Incommensurability-induced neurodivergent masking would theoretically occur more frequently in regions of greater structural distance.

These assignments are not laws of nature.

They designate **spaces of probability**.

This is precisely where an advantage over taxonomic classification lies. A person can move within the field depending on context, age, relationship, or institution.

There are now also ecologically grounded quantitative data for this context-dependence. Scheeren et al. (2025) examined 87 autistic adults over a period of 28 days using Ecological Momentary Assessment. Participants reported substantially less masking when they were alone than when other people were present. In the subgroup for which a direct comparison was possible, considerably less masking was also reported in the company of other autistic people than in non-autistic or mixed groups. At the same time, stronger masking was associated with higher momentarily perceived stress.

Thus, within the same person, the reported expression of masking changes depending on the social constellation. The study does not yet explain which mechanism produces this change. It does, however, provide strong evidence against understanding masking as an exclusively stable individual trait. For the field model, this is decisive: it is not only the person who changes their behaviour; their position within different relational constellations changes the conditions under which masking becomes necessary or unnecessary.

An autistic person may experience low asymmetry and high viability within a familiar partnership, while at the same time occupying a position of high distance and high asymmetrical translation demand in the workplace context.

Masking is therefore not only person-specific.

It is **context-specific and field-dependent**.

Naturally, this has implications for the Double Empathy Problem, but it does not refute it.

7.4 Movement Within the Field

The spatial theory enables a further step: masking can be modelled not only as a position, but as **movement**.

A change in social conditions shifts the position.

If a requirement is communicated more explicitly, structural distance may decrease.

If an institution takes over part of the adaptation work, asymmetry decreases.

If a person is given more Eigenzeit or sensory control, operative viability may increase.

Changes can thereby be analysed without immediately classifying them as masking or unmasking.

A presumed unmasking process might, for example, look like this:

Distance remains largely stable.

Asymmetry decreases substantially.

Viability increases.

Subjectively, this may be experienced as fundamental liberation.

Spatially, however, it becomes visible that the underlying difference between worlds has not disappeared. The person has merely reached a different position within the same relational problem.

Another process might look different:

Distance decreases, because shared forms of communication are learned.

Asymmetry remains high, because only one side still has to learn.

Viability increases slightly, because the acquired translation routine becomes automated.

Here too, masking costs decrease, but for a different reason.

The model thus makes it possible to distinguish different processes of change that may be described subjectively in similar ways.

7.5 Field Volume and Density

Alongside position and movement, another variable may become relevant: **field density**.

People rarely operate within only a single relation.

They move simultaneously through family, work, friendships, medical systems, administration, education, digital communication, and public life.

Each of these fields can generate its own structural distance and its own demands.

For many people, these domains remain partially separate.

For neurodivergent people, however, similar adaptation demands may occur across several domains at the same time.

This produces not only a single burdensome relation, but an **accumulation of masking fields**.

One could therefore distinguish between three variables:

Field position – How problematic is a concrete relation?

Field density – How many such relations exist simultaneously?

Field persistence – For how long can the person leave these relations—or not leave them?

This extension may be particularly important for better understanding neurodivergent burnout dynamics.

A single situation of high structural distance does not have to be problematic if it remains temporally limited.

If, however, school, family, work, medicine, and social relationships simultaneously generate high translation demands, the entire lifeworld may become a continuous masking zone.

The relevant burden would then no longer be only:

How strenuous is this conversation?

But:

Is there any domain left in which no permanent compatibility work is necessary?

7.6 The Field Is Dynamic, Not Static

A further misunderstanding would be to treat the 3D model as a fixed cartography of a person.

The dimensions change continuously.

A relationship may require less translation work as familiarity increases.

An institutional restructuring may intensify asymmetries.

Burnout may lower operative viability even though the external social situation remains unchanged.

New competencies may in turn automate certain translation operations.

Social changes also shift the field.

Concepts such as neurodivergence, stimming, sensory overload, or Double Empathy can increase social intelligibility and thereby reduce certain distances.

At the same time, new categories can generate new normative expectations.

The field therefore possesses a **temporal dimension**, even though this is not represented as a fourth spatial axis within the basic model.

A person does not describe a point.

They describe a **trajectory**.

7.7 From the Person to the Field Signature

From this, a different measurement model could potentially emerge.

Instead of asking only:

How strongly does this person mask?

a **Masking Field Signature** could be created.

Such a field signature would not produce a single value, but a relational profile.

For example:

Structural distance: high
Asymmetry: very high
Viability: low
Field density: high
Persistence: high
dominant generator: possible incommensurability + institutional normativity

Another person might report the same subjective exhaustion:

Structural distance: low
Asymmetry: high
Viability: medium
Field density: low
Persistence: medium
dominant generator: stigma + strategic self-presentation

Both people may suffer considerably.

But they suffer **under different field structures**.

This would make it clearer for the first time why the statement "Everyone masks" can be both correct and analytically insufficient.

Everyone can enter situations in which different expectations must be mediated.

But not everyone is permanently situated within the same **geometry of translation**.

7.8 The Model as a Research Programme

The three-dimensional masking field should therefore not be presented as a completed empirical theory.

It is initially a **model and research programme**.

Its dimensions must be operationalised, empirically tested, and modified where necessary.

In particular, the hypothesis of structural incommensurability requires further investigation. It may prove central for certain neurodivergent profiles and possess only limited explanatory power for others.

It also remains open whether the three proposed main axes are sufficient or whether further dimensions are empirically independent.

Precisely this openness, however, is a strength of the model.

It does not determine in advance what neurodivergent masking must be.

Rather, it provides a space within which different hypotheses can become **comparable and falsifiable**.

The most important methodological step consists in no longer treating masking exclusively as a psychological variable.

The relevant unit would be the **person-in-relation**.

Or, more precisely:

the position of a world-binding within a field of competing world-bindings.

Masking thereby shifts from a property of the individual to a problem of the **geometry of social relations**.

8. Operationalisation and Empirical Testing of the Masking Field

If the spatial model is to achieve more than providing a new metaphor, its central dimensions must in principle be made empirically accessible. At the same time, however, the model should not immediately be reduced once again to a single scale. Its theoretical function consists precisely in separating different structures that may collapse into a single aggregated masking score.

The relevant empirical unit would therefore be neither only the person nor solely their reported behaviour, but the **person-in-a-specific-field-constellation**.

This has substantial methodological consequences. The same person can occupy very different positions within the masking field when interacting with friends, at work, within a partnership, in medical situations, or in relation to public authorities. A measure that merely asks how strongly a person masks "in general" can capture these differences only to a limited extent.

The proposed model therefore requires context-sensitive investigation.

8.1 Empirically Capturing Structural Distance

The most difficult dimension is probably structural distance.

It must not simply be equated with subjectively experienced misunderstanding. Two people can understand one another poorly even though their relevance orders are largely compatible. Conversely, people can communicate successfully despite substantial structural differences because extensive translation work is taking place.

Structural distance would therefore have to be investigated through **how the same situation is organised by different participants**.

Possible questions might include:

Which aspects of a situation are spontaneously perceived as relevant?

Which information is taken for granted?

Which sequence of actions appears intuitively meaningful?

Which social signals receive high or low priority?

Which contradictions are experienced as disturbing?

Which temporal structure is taken as natural?

What form of explanation is necessary before a situation becomes manageable?

It would be particularly important not to establish one side as the reference point in advance. A neurotypical relevance order must not automatically function as the zero value from which neurodivergent deviation is measured.

Instead, **pairwise or field-related differences** could be investigated.

The question would then not be:

How far does Person A deviate from the norm?

But:

How strongly do relevance orders A and B differ with regard to the world-organisation required for this situation?

Structural distance would thereby genuinely become a relational variable.

8.2 Incommensurability as a Testable Hypothesis

Particular methodological caution is necessary with regard to the concept of incommensurability. In the present model, incommensurability designates neither an already empirically demonstrated neurological fact nor a binary property that assigns neurodivergent and neurotypical people to two closed worlds. Rather, the concept connects to the theoretical assumption developed above that different world-bindings may organise the same reality in ways that differ sufficiently for their relevance structures not to be fully translatable into one another without loss. Incommensurability therefore designates a **relational non-coincidence**, whose degree, form, and practical significance may vary between different persons, contexts, and neurodivergent profiles.

For the spatial model, this assumption is transferred into an empirically testable form. What would be decisive is not demonstrating absolute or complete untranslatability, but asking whether certain structural differences remain even when knowledge, experience, and communicative competence increase substantially. If observed difficulties arise primarily from lack of knowledge or insufficient experience, one would expect the relevance structures involved to converge substantially with increasing learning. If, by contrast, a stronger structural non-coincidence is present, a different pattern would be expected:

The person may become increasingly competent with growing experience while certain translation operations nevertheless remain necessary. The costs may decrease. The speed

may increase. Mediation may become automated. Outward conspicuousness may disappear almost completely. Nevertheless, the relation may remain characterised by the need to actively make different relevance orders compatible with one another.

Such a pattern would not "prove" incommensurability in the sense of an absolute separation. It would, however, increasingly speak against an explanation according to which the observed difference arises merely from insufficient social competence, lack of knowledge, or inadequate experience. What would instead be empirically relevant is the **degree of persistent non-coincidence despite increasing translation competence**.

Longitudinal studies would be particularly valuable here. They could investigate whether increasing social experience actually leads to convergence of the underlying relevance structures or primarily to an **improvement in translation performance between world-bindings that remain different**. Precisely this distinction could make it possible to investigate incommensurability empirically not as an essentialist group property, but as a variable structure of concrete relations.

8.3 Measuring Asymmetry

The second main dimension, the asymmetry of compatibility work, may be empirically more accessible.

Here, it can be investigated which side of an interaction has to make changes in order for the relation to function.

For example:

Who learns the other person's mode of communication?

Who has to explain behaviour?

Who changes routines?

Who anticipates misunderstandings?

Who adapts temporal structures?

Who regulates sensory conditions?

Who has to prove that their own perception is legitimate?

Who can take their own form of communication for granted?

The more strongly this work is concentrated on one side, the higher the asymmetry of the field would be.

The General Theory (Speed 2026d) describes precisely this political structure: the dominant order appears as reality itself, while other persons perform the work through which its non-universality remains invisible.

The spatial model turns this into an empirically investigable variable.

Particularly interesting here would be the comparison between subjective and observable asymmetry.

It is possible that both sides experience a relationship as "mutually adapted" even though closer analysis shows that one person anticipates, explains, and transforms considerably more.

Conversely, a person may experience strong asymmetry even though other participants perform substantial but less visible adaptation work.

The model should therefore combine self-report and relational observation.

8.4 Operative Viability

Operative viability, too, should not be equated with general well-being.

A person may feel comfortable in a situation and nevertheless have very little space for their own relevance order. Conversely, a highly productive or creative situation may temporarily be strenuous and still show high viability.

Viability therefore asks more specifically:

Can one's own world-binding persist and become effective within this relation?

Possible indicators would include:

- access to one's own attention and Eigenzeit,
- the possibility of using one's own forms of communication,
- maintenance of central interests and activities,
- low necessity for permanent self-suppression,
- possibility of one's own meaning-production,
- recovery of one's own relevance order after phases of translation,
- experience of resonance or co-formation.

High viability would mean that social participation does not permanently occur at the expense of those structures through which the person stabilises their own world.

8.5 Operationalising Field Depth

The proposed **field depth** could be captured through the number and type of levels affected simultaneously.

A masking situation may, for example, concern only visible expression.

Another may simultaneously involve:

language,

facial expression,

reconstruction of social meaning,

sensory regulation,

attention,

temporal control,

emotional regulation,

motor self-control.

The more of these levels are simultaneously affected by an adaptation or translation operation, the greater the field depth would be.

This would make it possible to capture an important difference:

A behaviour may be altered only slightly outwardly and nevertheless emerge from a deep reorganisation of several processes.

This could be particularly significant for highly compensating neurodivergent people. A calm, socially competent appearance says little about how many parallel processes were necessary to produce that appearance.

8.6 Field Density and Field Persistence

The burden of a masking field also depends on how many similar fields are active simultaneously and how easily they can be left.

Two additional contextual variables should therefore be considered:

Field density designates the number of simultaneously operative contexts in which substantial compatibility work is required.

Field persistence designates the temporal unavoidability of these constellations.

A one-hour occupational meeting and an entire school biography may occupy a similar local field position but produce entirely different long-term effects.

A person may cope well with intensive masking work if a space of high personal viability is available afterwards.

A constellation may become problematic where no such space remains.

School passes into family.

Family into leisure time.

Leisure time into digital communication.

Work into administration.

Medical support, in turn, demands new forms of legibility.

A nearly closed **masking ecology** then emerges.

For burnout research in particular, this perspective may be more important than the intensity of individual social events.

A recent Ecological Momentary Assessment study already provides strong indications that masking cannot adequately be understood as a context-independent property of a person. Scheeren et al. (2025) repeatedly assessed masking, social context, and perceived stress in 87 autistic adults over a period of 28 days. Participants reported substantially less masking when alone than in the presence of other people. Within the subgroup for which comparison between different neurotype constellations was possible, reported masking was also considerably lower in the company of other autistic people than in non-autistic or mixed groups. Higher momentary masking was simultaneously associated with higher perceived stress. The reported mean values illustrate the magnitude of this contextual effect: the mean masking score was 16.05% when alone compared with 36.07% in the presence of others. In the subsample used for the neurotype comparison, it was 20.39% in exclusively autistic social contexts compared with 39.60% in non-autistic or mixed contexts.

These findings are directly compatible with a field perspective: the same person changes their masking position depending on **who is part of the respective social relation**. The study therefore proves neither structural incommensurability nor the three-dimensional model proposed here; it does, however, contradict an interpretation of masking as a largely stable individual property and shows that the concrete expression of masking varies substantially with social context.

At the same time, the study makes a methodological limitation of current masking research particularly clear. Masking was operationalised in the EMA component using only a single item: whether participants had been able to be completely "themselves" during the previous four hours. The authors themselves point out that this item might also capture other forms of concealing personality, sexuality, or gender identity and therefore does not necessarily measure autistic masking exclusively. **From the perspective of the model developed here, this creates an additional theoretical difficulty:** the operationalisation directly couples masking to the distinction between "being myself" and not-being-oneself. A particular assumption of authenticity is thereby already inscribed into the measurement instrument, even though the relational structure of what appears as "self" or as masking would first have to be investigated theoretically.

It is precisely here that the masking field could enable methodological progress. Instead of measuring a person's change across different social situations merely as a greater or lesser departure from an authentic self, it could be investigated **which parameter of the field changes**: structural distance, asymmetry of compatibility work, operative viability, or the

overlap of several of these factors. The remarkable context-sensitivity of the EMA data would not thereby be relativised, but made structurally explicable.

8.7 From the Scale to the Field Map

From these considerations it follows that a future measurement instrument should not meaningfully produce only a single total score.

A better procedure could generate a **Masking Field Map**.

For individual contexts, it could capture several dimensions:

Dimension	Guiding question
Structural distance	How differently is the situation organised?
Asymmetry	Who carries the compatibility work?
Viability	Can one's own world-binding persist?
Field depth	How many levels must be mediated simultaneously?
Field density	In how many areas of life does the structure occur?
Field persistence	How persistent or unavoidable is it?
Energy effect	Does the operation consume, maintain, or generate energy?
Generator	Why does masking occur at all?

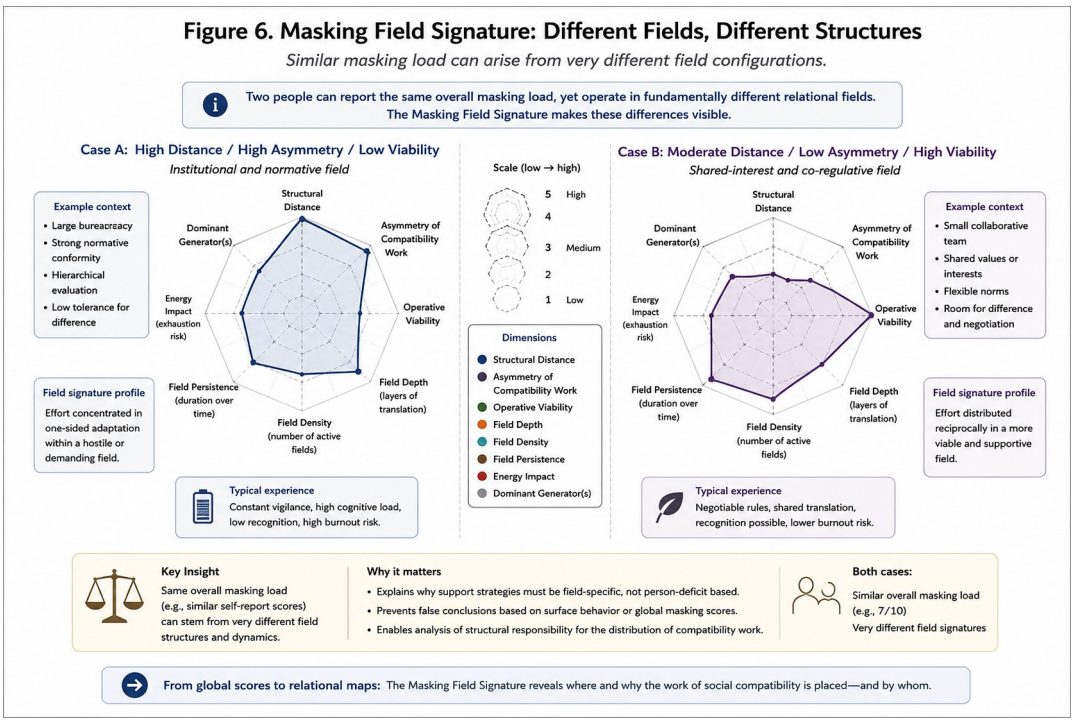


Figure 6. Masking Field Signature: Different Fields, Different Structures
Similar masking load can arise from very different field configurations.
Two people can report the same overall masking load, yet operate in fundamentally different relational fields.
The Masking Field Signature makes these differences visible.
Case A: High Distance / High Asymmetry / Low Viability
Institutional and normative field
Example context
• Large bureaucracy
• Strong normative conformity
• Hierarchical evaluation
• Low tolerance for difference
Field signature profile
Effort concentrated in one-sided adaptation within a hostile or demanding field.
Typical experience
Constant vigilance, high cognitive load, low recognition, high burnout risk.
Scale (low → high)
5 High
4
3 Medium
2
1 Low
Dimensions
Structural Distance
Asymmetry of Compatibility Work
Operative Viability
Field Depth
Field Density
Field Persistence
Energy Impact
Dominant Generator(s)
Case B: Moderate Distance / Low Asymmetry / High Viability
Shared-interest and co-regulative field
Example context
• Small collaborative team
• Shared values or interests
• Flexible norms
• Room for difference and negotiation
Field signature profile
Effort distributed reciprocally in a more viable and supportive field.
Typical experience
Negotiable rules, shared translation, recognition possible, lower burnout risk.
Key Insight
Same overall masking load (e.g., similar self-report scores) can stem from very different field structures and dynamics.
Why it matters
• Explains why support strategies must be field-specific, not person-deficit based.
• Prevents false conclusions based on surface behavior or global masking scores.
• Enables analysis of structural responsibility for the distribution of compatibility work.
Both cases:
Similar overall masking load (e.g., 7/10)
Very different field signatures
From global scores to relational maps: The Masking Field Signature reveals where and why the work of social compatibility is placed—and by whom.

Energy would thus become only one dimension among several.

This is decisive.

An instrument that measures costs alone cannot distinguish whether these arise from structural distance, fear, social sanction, high role density, time pressure, or a combination of these factors.

The field profile, by contrast, would ask about the **architecture of burden**.

8.8 A Possible Empirical Design

The model could initially be tested through exploratory qualitative and mixed-methods studies.

Participants could describe concrete situations in which they mask strongly, only slightly, or not at all. For each situation, the proposed field dimensions would then be reconstructed.

Neurodivergent and non-neurodivergent groups could be compared without assuming in advance that the decisive difference lies in intensity.

The more interesting question would be:

Do the field profiles differ?

One possible hypothesis, for example, would be that neurodivergent groups do not necessarily show higher values on all dimensions, but more frequently display combinations of:

high structural distance + high field depth + high persistence

A second hypothesis could be that stigma- and career-related masking are more strongly explicable through social sanction and strategic motivation, whereas certain neurodivergent forms persist even when immediate sanction is substantially reduced.

A third hypothesis would be that supportive environments particularly change **asymmetry** and **viability**, while structural distance partially remains.

The last hypothesis in particular would be central to understanding unmasking.

If people are substantially less exhausted after a change in their environment even though differences in communication, attention, or temporal structure persist, this would support the assumption that relief arises at least partly through **field change rather than elimination of difference**.

8.9 Falsifiability of the Model

A theory does not gain strength by allowing every observation to be integrated into it retrospectively.

It must therefore also be specified what would count against the model proposed here.

The incommensurability hypothesis would, for example, be weakened if it could be shown that supposedly deeper neurodivergent differences disappear completely given sufficient learning time and that no stable differences in relevance organisation or translation necessity remain.

The field theory as a whole would lose explanatory power if masking costs could be predicted almost entirely from individual characteristics and changes in the relational environment had little influence.

The assumption of asymmetry would likewise have to be revised if closer investigation showed that the supposedly dominant side regularly performs comparable compatibility work.

These possibilities should explicitly remain open.

The aim of the model is not to prove incommensurability.

It is to **make empirically investigable a structure that has so far remained largely invisible within purely psychological models of masking**.

8.10 From the Masking Score to the Geometry of Masking

This gives rise to a fundamentally different research logic.

A masking score asks:

How much masking is present?

A field analysis asks:

What kind of space generates this masking?

This difference is not minor.

It shifts the object of research from an individual behaviour to a relational architecture.

The high masking burden of certain neurodivergent people could then no longer appear exclusively as a property of their psychological profile.

It could partly be a measurable expression of **how far their relevance orders lie from dominant social structures, how deeply the necessary translation work intervenes in their world-organisation, and how little of this work is taken over by the environment**.

That would be the empirical core of a spatial theory of neurodivergent masking:

Not merely measuring the mask.

But the **space that makes its formation necessary**.

9. Consequences for Neurodivergence Research and Diagnostics

If masking is understood as a field phenomenon, not only its theoretical description changes. The logic of diagnostic and clinical interpretation must also be reconsidered. For as long as masking is treated primarily as individual adaptive behaviour, there is a risk that precisely those people who are particularly successful at stabilising their position within an unfavourable field will be the least likely to be recognised as neurodivergent.

Earlier works have already pointed to this diagnostic paradox. Autistic competence, stability, or situational adaptability can be interpreted as evidence against autism, while the neurodivergent structure appears credible only in overload, breakdown, or burnout. Diagnostic recognition thereby becomes effectively tied to visible failure.

The spatial model allows this short circuit to be described more precisely.

A person may appear outwardly highly compatible and nevertheless occupy a field position characterised by great structural distance, high field depth, and asymmetrically distributed compatibility work. Successful behaviour would then not be evidence of little difference, but possibly the expression of a particularly efficient translation structure.

9.1 Confusing Surface with Field Position

Conventional diagnostics necessarily works with visible or reportable characteristics. Social communication, eye contact, gesture, reciprocal interaction, routines, or repetitive behaviours are observed and categorised.

The problem begins where the visible surface is used to infer the underlying structure directly.

A person conducts a fluent conversation.

From this it is concluded:

low social difference.

A person displays appropriate eye contact.

From this it is concluded:

no relevant divergence.

A person has friendships, a partnership, or occupational competencies.

From this it is concluded:

high social intuition or low neurodivergent impairment.

A field model forces an additional question:

Under what conditions was this surface produced?

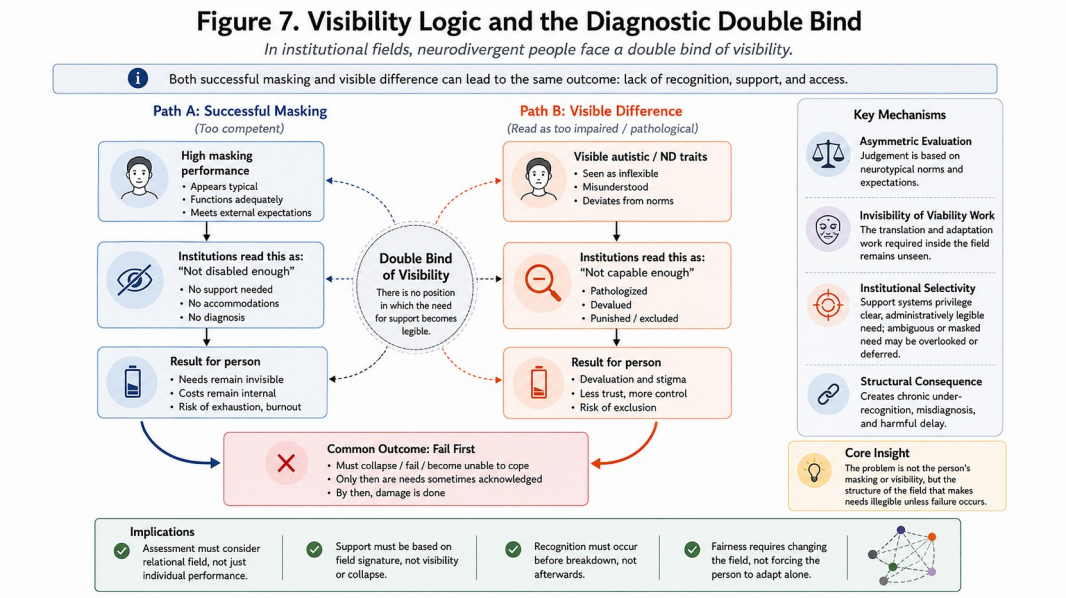


Figure 7. Visibility Logic and the Diagnostic Double Bind
In institutional fields, neurodivergent people face a double bind of visibility.
Both successful masking and visible difference can lead to the same outcome: lack of recognition, support, and access.
Path A: Successful Masking
(Too competent)
High masking performance
• Appears typical
• Functions adequately
• Meets external expectations
Institutions read this as:
"Not disabled enough"
• No support needed
• No accommodations
• No diagnosis
Result for person
• Needs remain invisible
• Costs remain internal
• Risk of exhaustion, burnout
Double Bind of Visibility
There is no position in which the need for support becomes legible.
Path B: Visible Difference
(Read as too impaired / pathological)
Visible autistic / ND traits
• Seen as inflexible
• Misunderstood
• Deviates from norms
Institutions read this as:
"Not capable enough"
• Pathologized
• Devalued
• Punished / excluded
Result for person
• Devaluation and stigma
• Less trust, more control
• Risk of exclusion
Common Outcome: Fail First
• Must collapse / fail / become unable to cope
• Only then are needs sometimes acknowledged
• By then, damage is done
Key Mechanisms
Asymmetric Evaluation
Judgement is based on neurotypical norms and expectations.
Invisibility of Viability Work
The translation and adaptation work required inside the field remains unseen.
Institutional Selectivity
Support systems privilege clear, administratively legible need; ambiguous or masked need may be overlooked or deferred.
Structural Consequence
Creates chronic under-recognition, misdiagnosis, and harmful delay.
Core Insight
The problem is not the person's masking or visibility, but the structure of the field that makes needs illegible unless failure occurs.
Implications
Assessment must consider relational field, not just individual performance.
Support must be based on field signature, not visibility or collapse.
Recognition must occur before breakdown, not afterwards.
Fairness requires changing the field, not forcing the person to adapt alone.

That a social form appears stable initially tells us only that it has been successfully stabilised.

It does not tell us how many operations were necessary to produce that stability.

This is precisely where the diagnostic significance of field depth lies.

Two people can display the same observable behaviour while, for one person, largely spontaneous synchronisation is taking place and, for the other, several parallel translation processes are required.

The surface is the same.

The architecture is different.

9.2 Masking as Competence Must Not Make Neurodivergence Invisible

The concept of compensation already creates some awareness of this problem. Nevertheless, it often remains embedded within a deficit logic.

According to this logic, the person possesses an original deficit that is compensated for through additional strategies.

A field model permits a different description.

Not:

deficit + compensation = apparently normal behaviour

but:

structural difference + translation capacity = operative compatibility

The difference is substantial.

In the first model, neurotypical functioning remains the implicit reference point. The neurodivergent person attempts to compensate for a deficit relative to this norm.

In the second model, none of the relevance orders involved is presupposed as ontologically neutral. Rather, the person possesses competencies through which they mediate between different orders.

This mediation can be highly developed.

Successful masking performances in particular could therefore be understood as **competence at a system boundary**.

To use them diagnostically against neurodivergence would then be a category error.

9.3 Diagnostics Would Have to Become More Relational

A field-theoretical diagnostics would therefore have to ask not only **what a person can do**, but how this capacity comes about.

For example:

Is social meaning immediately available, or is it reconstructed?

Is eye contact an integral part of communication, or an additionally regulated operation?

Are conversational turn-taking processes synchronised intuitively, or governed through rules, patterns, and experience?

Can a person maintain social synchronisation and deep content processing simultaneously?

What attention is redirected toward social legibility?

How does performance change under time pressure, sensory burden, or multiple simultaneous demands?

Which forms of social interaction become easier when the other side changes its communication?

These questions do not examine mere ability.

They examine the **conditions under which ability emerges**.

This is precisely what could make it possible diagnostically to distinguish between outwardly similar behaviours.

A person may, for example, be socially successful because their relevance structure strongly overlaps with the environment.

Another may be socially successful because they possess extraordinarily effective translation mechanisms.

To classify both simply as identically "socially competent" erases the structural difference.

9.4 The Environment as a Diagnostic Variable

A further consequence is even more fundamental.

If masking is a field phenomenon, the environment can no longer be treated exclusively as a background variable.

The same person can appear completely different in two social contexts.

In a strongly implicit, hierarchical, and sensorily burdensome environment, high translation demands may arise.

In an explicit, flexible, and interest-based environment, the same differences may become almost unproblematic.

A traditional interpretation might conclude from this that the symptoms are inconsistent.

A field-theoretical interpretation, by contrast, would expect the visible expression to change because the **geometry of the field changes**.

This does not mean that every situational variability should be interpreted as neurodivergence.

It means only that context sensitivity is not counter-evidence against an underlying structural difference.

On the contrary: it can provide information about **which field parameters are decisive for the person concerned**.

9.5 The Danger of Diagnostic Burden as Proof

When exhaustion, burnout, and visible dysfunction become strong diagnostic signals, a problematic incentive emerges within the system.

The person appears more credibly neurodivergent the worse their compatibility performance functions.

Earlier work (Speed 2026a) has criticised precisely this structure: masking often becomes diagnostically visible only at the moment of its failure, causing stable or competent neurodivergent existence itself to come under suspicion.

A recent qualitative study by Dalmo (2026) provides a remarkably direct institutional parallel. Based on interviews with nine autistic adults, Dalmo develops the concept of **visibility logic**. This refers to a logic in which support needs appear credible and relevant only when they are outwardly visible and legible within neurotypical expectation patterns. Successful masking is therefore often interpreted as competence, independence, or low support need; visibly autistic behaviour, by contrast, can produce undervaluation, stigmatisation, or exclusion. A double bind emerges in which both visible and successfully concealed autistic difference can lead to misinterpretation.

What is decisive is that this visibility logic does not merely misinterpret masking, but itself **produces and intensifies** it. Dalmo describes masking as a structural response to institutional misrecognition: schools, healthcare systems, and welfare systems can, through their criteria for which forms of burden count as credible, compel precisely those adaptive strategies that subsequently make actual support needs invisible.

This becomes particularly clear in an institutional dynamic described by Dalmo as **"fail first."** Participants reported that explicitly stated support needs were insufficient as long as competence or stability remained outwardly visible. Support was sometimes considered only once burden had escalated into a visible crisis. Dalmo explicitly states that, in the absence of an observable crisis, expressed need was judged insufficient and affected people effectively had to "fail first" before support became accessible. In the following passages, she further describes how support was sometimes granted only after visible breakdown and how articulate communication was wrongly interpreted as evidence of sufficient coping.

This empirically developed *fail-first* dynamic converges strikingly with a previously described diagnostic structure in which recognition is tied to decompensation. In *Masking Is Not an Exhaustion Symptom*, this mechanism was conceptualised as a structural logic in which visible failure becomes the condition of diagnostic legibility: "Breakdown becomes the condition of visibility," while support begins only once existence has already been damaged. The relation is therefore not identical, but structurally closely related: Dalmo demonstrates it empirically in support systems, while the earlier analysis describes it theoretically within a diagnostic logic of representation. Precisely this independent convergence strengthens the assumption that visible failure can become institutionally preferred as proof of invisible burden.

Within the spatial model, *visibility logic* can therefore be understood as a concrete mechanism of high raster asymmetry. The institution determines which signs count as credible evidence; the autistic person must translate their experience into this raster. If the translation succeeds too well, they are read as not needing help. If it fails, their communication may appear inadequate or the person themselves may appear incompetent. The person thus bears the costs of a field whose dominant side does not have to alter its own order of legibility.

The spatial model permits an alternative.

Exhaustion remains important information.

But it is a variable in the course of the field, not proof of authenticity.

A person would not first have to collapse for the underlying relation to become visible.

Instead, structural distance, field depth, asymmetry, and persistence could already be investigated **before** severe consequential harm occurs.

Diagnostics would thereby shift from a retrospective registration of failure toward an analysis of the conditions under which failure becomes likely.

9.6 Unmasking Must Not Become a Diagnostic Counter-Standard

The increasing attention given to unmasking does not automatically solve this problem either.

Once clinicians have learned that autistic people may mask, a new expectation can arise:

A "truly" autistic person must remove their mask within the protected diagnostic setting and thereby display a clearly recognisable autistic appearance.

This would merely replace one raster with another.

The person would initially be viewed with suspicion if they appeared too neurotypical.

They could then become equally suspect if they did not "unmask" in the expected way.

Such a logic underestimates the fact that social forms developed over decades cannot be switched off at will and that unmasking itself is context-dependent.

The field model therefore suggests:

There is no diagnostically neutral state outside relational form-building.

The assessment situation itself is a field.

There too, roles, expectations, temporal structures, power relations, and ideas about which forms of behaviour count as diagnostically relevant are present.

9.7 Masking Scales as Partial Measures Rather Than Total Models

This perspective does not make existing masking instruments worthless.

Questionnaires can provide important information about concrete strategies, self-control, and subjective experiences.

The problem arises only when they become a total model of the phenomenon.

A high score may indicate:

A great deal of reported masking activity is taking place here.

But it cannot readily answer:

Why?

Between which relevance orders?

At what field depth?

Under what asymmetry?

With what energetic effect?

And how strongly does the constellation change when the environment is changed?

A field model would therefore not replace conventional masking scales, but **embed** them.

The masking score would become one measurement layer within a larger relational profile.

9.8 A New Meaning of Diagnostic Contradictions

This becomes particularly interesting in cases of contradictory diagnostic data.

A person may show high masking scores while at the same time appearing relatively inconspicuous in a standardised interaction.

A purely behaviour-centred model easily generates a contradiction here.

Either the person is in fact masking strongly.

Or the observable behaviour speaks against the hypothesised neurodivergent structure.

Within the field model, this contradiction does not necessarily exist.

A high masking score may precisely explain **why** a brief standardised interaction appears relatively inconspicuous.

Conversely, a high score alone does not prove neurodivergence, because other masking generators can also produce high values.

The model therefore does not demand an automatic diagnostic upgrading of masking scores.

It demands **causal differentiation**.

The decisive question is:

Which field structure generates the high score?

High masking scores can therefore be used neither simply against nor automatically in favour of a diagnosis.

They become a reason for further investigation.

9.9 From a Deficit Profile to a Relational Profile

In the longer term, this could lead to a different form of diagnostic description.

Instead of an exclusively person-centred deficit profile, a **relational profile** could additionally be created.

Such a profile might, for example, describe:

Social structure: high competence with explicit communication, substantially higher translation demand under implicit social expectations.

Attention: high viability in monotropic deep focus, high costs under permanent interruption and social multi-channel processing.

Temporality: high self-regulatory capacity in self-structured tasks, strong incompatibility with fragmented administrative temporal regimes.

Sensory processing: high context-dependence of operative viability.

Masking field: high field depth and strong asymmetry in institutional situations, substantially lower asymmetry in familiar relationships.

Such a profile would not claim that the person is undefinable outside their relationships.

It would merely acknowledge that functional difficulties and competencies often **emerge relationally**.

9.10 Consequences for Support and Therapy

Interventions would also change accordingly.

If burden is located exclusively within the person, obvious goals consist in training, coping, resilience, or improved adaptation.

If, by contrast, a substantial part of the burden arises from an unfavourable field geometry, other interventions become possible:

- reduction of unnecessary implicit demands,
- more explicit communication,
- greater control over temporal structures,
- sensory adaptations,
- reduction of permanent social legibility,
- distribution of translation work across several participants,
- protection of Eigenzeit and specialised relevance orders.

The difference lies in the fact that support does not ask exclusively:

How can the neurodivergent person function better?

But also:

How can the field be changed so that less one-sided compatibility work is necessary?

This corresponds to the shift already developed in the General Theory from individual integration to Raster Justice: the person alone should not be better integrated into existing rasters; the rasters themselves must recognise their selectivity and become capable of sustaining different world-bindings.

9.11 Diagnostics as Observation of Morphogenetic Pressure

This could ultimately also change the diagnostic direction of observation.

No longer exclusively:

Which symptoms does the person show?

But additionally:

Where does morphogenetic pressure arise, how is it managed, and what happens when its distribution is changed?

This could provide more information, particularly in complex or highly masking cases, than the search for a supposedly unaltered behavioural surface.

A diagnostic assessment could, for example, deliberately create different field conditions:

more or less time pressure,

explicit versus implicit communication,

interest-based versus socially standardised interaction,

low versus high sensory burden,

strong versus low external structuring.

Not in order to artificially provoke a person, but to investigate **how their operative architecture changes under different relational conditions**.

Diagnostics would thereby search less for the "real autistic person behind the mask."

It would investigate **how a concrete neurodivergent world-binding operates across different fields**.

That would be a fundamental shift:

from the search for a hidden essence

to the analysis of a **relational structure**.

10. From Unmasking to Raster Justice: The Political Geometry of the Masking Field

If masking is understood not exclusively as individual behaviour, but as work within a relational field, the political question changes as well. The central task can then not consist in enabling as many people as possible to unmask. Nor is it sufficient to make individual adaptation strategies more comfortable, more efficient, or less harmful to health.

The decisive question is rather:

How is the work distributed through which different world-bindings are kept compatible within a shared social space?

The General Theory (Speed 2026d) has already prepared this transition. There, masking is not understood as a problem that could be eliminated completely. As long as different world-bindings exist, translation work remains necessary. What is decisive is therefore not its abolition, but its distribution.

The spatial model now makes it possible to locate this political question more precisely.

10.1 Difference Does Not Yet Produce Violence

A field of high structural distance is not automatically an unjust field.

Two people can organise the same situation very differently and nevertheless establish a viable relationship. Different temporalities, forms of communication, perceptual priorities, or forms of social synchronisation do not have to disappear.

Morphogenetic pressure, too, is not fundamentally pathological in this sense. Earlier works define it precisely as a consequence of the fact that different world-bindings exist simultaneously and cannot be fully dissolved into one another.

The political problem begins where the work of dealing with this difference is **systematically distributed asymmetrically**.

One order is then treated as self-evident.

The other becomes a deviation.

One mode of communication is treated as normal.

The other must be explained.

One temporal structure is treated as realistic.

The other as poor organisation.

One sensory environment is treated as neutral.

The person who cannot tolerate it appears oversensitive.

Under such conditions, a relational difference becomes individualised.

10.2 Raster Power

The concept of **Raster Power** can be introduced for this structure.

Raster Power designates the capacity of a relevance order to make its own acts of selection no longer appear as acts of selection.

The dominant raster does not have to translate itself.

It appears as the world itself.

Other world-bindings, by contrast, are measured according to how well they are legible within this raster.

The General Theory describes precisely this transition: stabilisation is initially necessary for every social system. It becomes problematic where it forgets its own selectivity and turns a practical order into an allegedly natural reality.

Raster Power is therefore not identical with intentional oppression.

A person, institution, or culture does not have to consciously decide to disadvantage neurodivergent people.

It is enough for its own form of world-organisation to be presupposed as neutral.

The adaptation work of the other side then appears not as relational work, but as a personal obligation.

10.3 Neurodivergent Masking as Privatised Compatibility Work and Forced Neurotypical Identity Work

From this perspective, highly pronounced neurodivergent masking in particular can be politically reinterpreted.

It may be more than self-adaptation.

It can represent a form of **privatised social compatibility work**, or even *Forced Neurotypical Identity Work* (Speed 2026f).

A person individually takes over the translation work required for a structurally heterogeneous society to appear outwardly more homogeneous than it actually is.

They learn implicit rules.

They adapt their temporal structure.

They regulate sensory reactions.

They translate direct statements into socially expected forms.

They explain needs in institutionally accepted terms.

They produce legibility.

The more successfully this operation succeeds, the less the dominant order has to change its own limitations.

A paradoxical relation thereby emerges:

Successful masking can stabilise precisely the environment that makes masking necessary.

This mechanism was already described in the General Theory as one function of masking: through successful translation work, the non-universality of the dominant order becomes invisible.

The field model makes visible where this invisibility arises.

10.4 The Political Limit of Individual Unmasking

This also reveals a limit of individualised politics of unmasking.

If an individual neurodivergent person decides no longer to perform certain adaptation operations, this does not automatically change the field.

The institution remains.

The school retains its temporal structure.

The company retains its communication rules.

The administration retains its categories.

The social group retains its expectations.

The person can reject parts of this order. But the morphogenetic tension itself is not thereby abolished. This is precisely why the General Theory describes masking and unmasking as different responses to the same structural constellation.

Unmasking can therefore be politically ambivalent.

It can represent a necessary form of self-assertion.

But it can also mean that the person now confronts the incommensurability previously managed individually directly through sanction, exclusion, or loss of functioning.

The alternative to harmful masking therefore cannot consist exclusively in:

Mask less.

It must also mean:

Change the field conditions that make one-sided masking necessary.

10.5 Raster Justice as a Change in Field Geometry

Here, the already developed concept of **Raster Justice** acquires a concrete spatial meaning.

Raster Justice does not mean making all rasters identical to one another.

Nor does it mean dissolving every social expectation.

Social systems require categories, rules, temporal structures, and forms of coordinated legibility. A completely unstructured social world would itself be incapable of action. The General Theory therefore explicitly emphasises that stabilisation and complexity reduction are initially necessary conditions of collective organisation.

Raster Justice begins instead where a raster recognises its own selectivity.

Within the masking field, this means at least three possible changes:

structural distance can be reduced by creating translation surfaces and shared forms;

asymmetry can be reduced by ensuring that adaptation work is not performed only by the marginalised side;

operative viability can be increased by allowing different world-bindings to persist within the same social space.

Inclusion thereby acquires a different meaning.

Inclusion would no longer primarily mean:

How do we integrate this person better into our order?

But:

How do we organise a shared space in which different orders remain capable of acting?

In this context, the right to ontological coexistence (Speed 2026g) also becomes central: the right to refuse adaptation and to be allowed to exist for oneself.

10.6 Not Equal Work, but Just Work

Such a perspective does not mean that translation work must be distributed exactly equally.

Certain people possess greater competencies in particular situations.

A neurodivergent person may, for example, be very good at translating between different forms of communication. Another person may possess better institutional knowledge. Yet another may be able to mediate conflicts.

Justice therefore does not mean mathematical equal distribution.

It means that a society does **not permanently assign translation work to the same side on the basis of an alleged normality**.

The problem is not that an autistic person occasionally uses neurotypical forms of communication.

The problem arises when only they have to work on the difference and this work simultaneously remains invisible.

Accordingly, not every adaptation would constitute violence.

Violence arises where morphogenetic pressure is systematically distributed one-sidedly and this distribution is naturalised. The General Theory already formulates this as structural violence through the asymmetrical distribution of the work required to make non-neutralisable differences socially manageable.

10.7 The Right to Low Legibility

The field model also gives rise to a further political question: **How legible must a person be?**

Modern institutions demand permanent translatability.

People must explain their needs.

Document their capacity to perform.

Make their biographies plausible.

Express their motivation.

Classify their limitations.

Make their productivity visible.

These demands by no means concern neurodivergence alone. For neurodivergent people in particular, however, they can accumulate with already existing translation demands.

Legibility itself thereby becomes a form of work.

The General Theory accordingly describes masking as a technology of legibility: social orders maintain their capacity for action by translating reality into processable forms, but in doing so simultaneously generate new forms of invisibility.

Raster Justice could therefore also include a **right to partial illegibility**.

Not every Eigenzeit must be fully justified.

Not every mode of communication must be translated into normative psychology.

Not every sensory boundary requires a biographical explanation.

Not every form of neurodivergent world-binding must become completely understandable to a dominant order before it can count as legitimate.

A plural social space would have to be capable of partially **sustaining difference without completely dissolving it**.

This also raises a fundamental question about *representational violence* (Speed 2025b): the violence that consists in something having to make itself representable and objectifiable.

10.8 From Accommodation to Co-Formation

The concept of adaptation or *accommodation* can also be expanded from this perspective.

Classical accommodation often changes conditions so that a person can function better within an existing system.

This can be necessary and valuable.

The field model, however, opens up a stronger possibility:

Co-Formation.

Here, not only one side changes its behaviour, nor does the system merely alter individual boundary conditions.

Rather, from the encounter between different relevance orders, a new shared form emerges that previously belonged fully to neither side.

This would be the productive limit case of masking.

Not:

A becomes more like B.

Nor:

B tolerates A.

But:

A and B generate C.

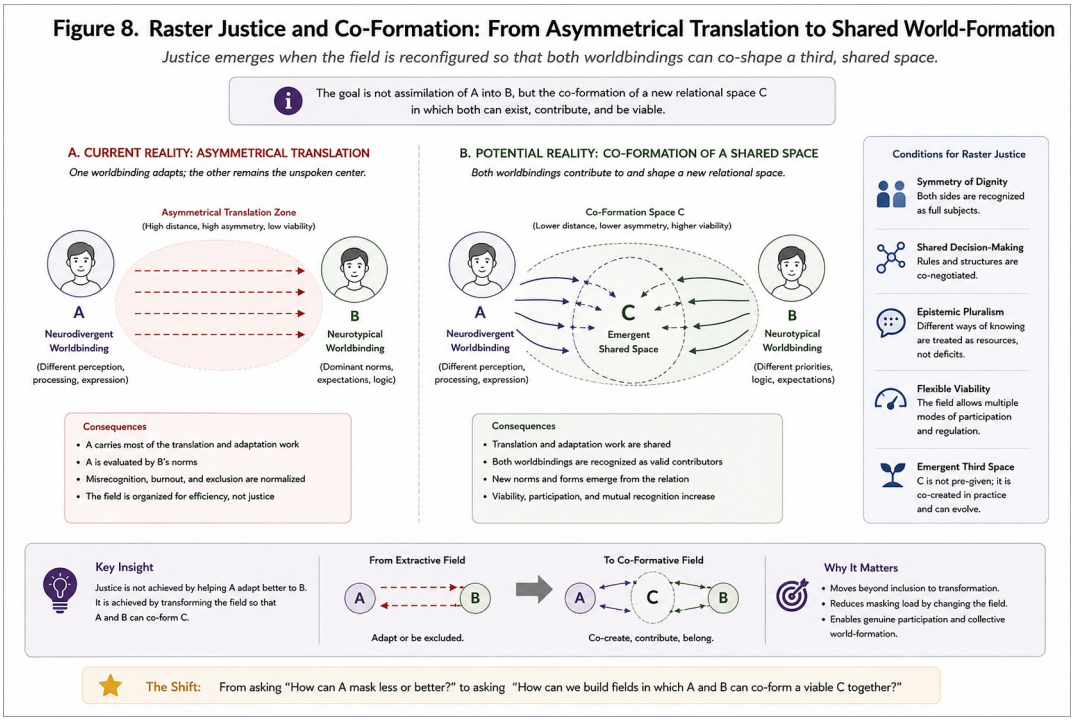


Figure 8. Raster Justice and Co-Formation: From Asymmetrical Translation to Shared World-Formation
Justice emerges when the field is reconfigured so that both worldbindings can co-shape a third, shared space.
The goal is not assimilation of A into B, but the co-formation of a new relational space C in which both can exist, contribute, and be viable.
A. CURRENT REALITY: ASYMMETRICAL TRANSLATION
One worldbinding adapts; the other remains the unspoken center.
Asymmetrical Translation Zone
(High distance, high asymmetry, low viability)
A
Neurodivergent Worldbinding
(Different perception, processing, expression)
B
Neurotypical Worldbinding
(Dominant norms, expectations, logic)
Consequences
A carries most of the translation and adaptation work
A is evaluated by B's norms
Misrecognition, burnout, and exclusion are normalized
The field is organized for efficiency, not justice
B. POTENTIAL REALITY: CO-FORMATION OF A SHARED SPACE
Both worldbindings contribute to and shape a new relational space.
Co-Formation Space C
(Lower distance, lower asymmetry, higher viability)
A
Neurodivergent Worldbinding
(Different perception, processing, expression)
C
Emergent Shared Space
B
Neurotypical Worldbinding
(Different priorities, logic, expectations)
Consequences
Translation and adaptation work are shared
Both worldbindings are recognized as valid contributors
New norms and forms emerge from the relation
Viability, participation, and mutual recognition increase
Conditions for Raster Justice
Symmetry of Dignity
Both sides are recognized as full subjects.
Shared Decision-Making
Rules and structures are co-negotiated.
Epistemic Pluralism
Different ways of knowing are treated as resources, not deficits.
Flexible Viability
The field allows multiple modes of participation and regulation.
Emergent Third Space
C is not pre-given; it is co-created in practice and can evolve.
Key Insight
Justice is not achieved by helping A adapt better to B. It is achieved by transforming the field so that A and B can co-form C.
From Extractive Field
A
B
Adapt or be excluded.
To Co-Formative Field
A
C
B
Co-create, contribute, belong.
Why It Matters
Moves beyond inclusion to transformation.
Reduces masking load by changing the field.
Enables genuine participation and collective world-formation.
The Shift: From asking "How can A mask less or better?" to asking "How can we build fields in which A and B can co-form a viable C together?"

In earlier works, precisely this possibility appears as a transformative form of masking: not the simulation of another world, but the production of a new relational space between incommensurable or only partially compatible forms.

This also changes the meaning of social competence.

The highest competence would not necessarily consist in perfect adaptation.

It may lie in the ability to **generate new transitional spaces between different world-bindings**.

10.9 Productive Difference

Such a space ultimately changes the evaluation of difference itself.

As long as a single raster dominates, divergences appear primarily as costs.

They generate communication problems.

Temporal problems.

Institutional difficulties.

Sensory conflicts.

Yet the same differences can become productive under different field conditions.

Different attentional orders can make other problems visible.

Different temporalities can enable new forms of work.

Unusual perceptual priorities can generate scientific, technical, or artistic innovation.

This does not mean romantically reinterpreting neurodivergence as a special gift.

The point is structural:

Whether difference appears as a deficit or a resource depends in part on how the field is organised.

Precisely this question already underlies the General Theory: the distribution of translation work helps determine whether difference appears socially as a resource or as a deficit.

10.10 A Political Geometry Rather Than a Politics of the Self

The spatial masking model thus leads to a different political language.

Many current debates move between two imperatives:

Adapt yourself.

or:

Be authentic.

Both are initially directed at the person.

The first demands adaptation.

The second demands self-disclosure.

A field theory asks a third question:

Why is the field built in such a way that this choice becomes necessary at all?

This shifts politics from the self to the relation.

Not exclusively:

How should I present myself?

But:

Which social geometry determines which forms can exist at all without permanent translation work?

This shift is particularly relevant to neurodivergence.

On the one hand, it prevents masking from being understood exclusively as an individual deficit or harmful self-denial.

On the other hand, it prevents unmasking from becoming a new normative obligation.

The political alternative would not be a society without masks.

Such a society would probably be just as impossible as a society without roles, translation, or difference.

The alternative would be a society in which the **costs of non-coincidence do not systematically fall upon the same people**.

Raster Justice can therefore be formulated precisely within the masking field:

Not the abolition of difference. Not the abolition of all translation.But a more just distribution of the work through which different worlds can coexist.

That would be the political consequence of a spatial theory of neurodivergent masking.

11. Limits of the Model and Open Research Questions

The proposed spatial model extends masking theory by adding a relational and structural level. Precisely because it makes a relatively broad theoretical claim, however, its limits must be stated explicitly. The model should not be understood as an already empirically confirmed description of neurodivergent reality. It is initially a **theoretical architecture** intended to make different phenomena that have so far often been conflated distinguishable from one another and thereby empirically investigable.

This applies in particular to the assumption of structural incommensurability.

The General Theory already assumes that different world-bindings cannot be fully translated into one another without losing part of their respective specificity. Morphogenetic pressure arises precisely from this difference that cannot be fully neutralised. The present model goes one step further by asking whether certain neurodivergent profiles might systematically be positioned more frequently or more strongly within such relations.

This step is theoretically plausible, but empirically open.

11.1 Incommensurability Is Relational, Not Group-Essentialist

The greatest danger of the model would not consist in assuming incommensurability at all, but in turning it once again into a static property of clearly delimited groups of people. The

thesis of possible incommensurability between different forms of world-formation developed in *They Cannot Understand* is therefore not withdrawn here, but **relationally specified**. Incommensurability does not designate a substance that "belongs" to a person or a neurotype, but a structure of non-coincidence that arises where different world-bindings, relevance orders, or forms of meaning-organisation encounter one another and cannot be fully translated into one another without loss.

The statement

A deep, partially non-neutralisable incommensurability can exist between certain world-bindings

is therefore not identical with the statement

Autistic and neurotypical people are, as groups of persons, fundamentally and completely incommensurable.

The second formulation would turn a relational difference into a binary ontology of two homogeneous groups. This is neither necessary for the present model nor compatible with the heterogeneity of neurodivergent existence. *They Cannot Understand* already emphasises that, despite recurring commonalities, one can speak neither of an unequivocally autistic language nor of a uniform autistic way of perceiving the world. Different neurodivergent people respond differently to displacement, liminality, and non-coincidence.

Incommensurability should therefore not be understood as a boundary **between people**, but as a possible property of a **relation between world-bindings**. The same autistic person may experience very great structural distance in one field and almost immediate compatibility in another. Two neurodivergent people may be highly compatible with one another on certain dimensions while differing considerably in other relevance structures. Likewise, neurodivergent and neurotypical people may locally generate high resonance or shared world-formation without all underlying differences therefore disappearing.

The field model therefore does not lead to a new opposition of

ND world versus NT world.

Rather, it replaces such a division with a field of multiple, partially overlapping and partially incommensurable world-bindings. Neurodivergence and neurotypicality can occupy statistically, historically, and institutionally different positions within this field without each forming a closed ontology. What is decisive is not which group a person belongs to, but **which differences become effective within a concrete relation, how deeply these differences reach, and under which conditions they must be made compatible**.

This also preserves the stronger thesis from *They Cannot Understand*: difference cannot necessarily be dissolved through complete mutual understanding. Plural world-formation generates non-coincidence, and precisely this non-coincidence can be productive, tension-filled, or conflictual. The problem does not begin with the existence of such differences, but where one world-binding renders its own selectivity invisible and shifts the costs of

translation one-sidedly onto others. The General Theory describes this structure as morphogenetic pressure between world-bindings that are only partially compatible.

11.2 Neurodivergence Is Not a Homogeneous Field Position

A second limitation concerns the concept of neurodivergence itself.

Autism, ADHD, and other neurodivergent constellations cannot readily be mapped onto the same axis values. Considerable heterogeneity is to be expected even within diagnostic categories.

The model should therefore not predict:

Autism = high structural distance.

A more useful hypothesis is:

Certain neurodivergent profiles may, under certain social conditions, have an increased probability of particular field constellations.

This leaves open which differences are particularly relevant.

For some people, sensory non-coincidence may be decisive.

For others, temporality.

For others, social meaning-making.

For still others, institutional self-organisation.

And some people may possess high overlap with dominant rasters in several domains.

The theory should not subsequently smooth out these differences.

Its task is precisely to make them spatially describable.

11.3 The Axes Are Analytical, Not Necessarily Ontologically Independent

The three main axes of the model—structural distance, asymmetry, and operative viability—were also initially separated analytically.

Empirically, however, they may correlate with one another.

High structural distance might, for example, frequently generate higher translation demands.

High asymmetry might reduce operative viability over the long term.

Low viability might in turn intensify perceived structural distance.

There is therefore a risk that an apparently three-dimensional space partially represents the same underlying dynamic several times.

This must be tested empirically.

The aim should not be to preserve the proposed axes at all costs. If it turns out that two dimensions cannot be meaningfully distinguished empirically, the model would have to be modified accordingly.

Additional dimensions may likewise become necessary.

11.4 Field Depth, Field Density, and Persistence Are Not Yet Independent Basic Axes

The same applies to the concepts of **field depth**, **field density**, and **field persistence** introduced in the course of the paper.

They extend the basic model, but initially possess a different theoretical status from the three main axes.

Field depth describes how many levels of one's own world-organisation are simultaneously affected by a translation operation.

Field density describes how many corresponding constellations occur simultaneously within a lifeworld.

Field persistence describes their temporal unavoidability.

It is currently open whether these variables should be treated as independent dimensions, moderators, or properties of more complex field configurations.

Precisely for this reason, the model should initially remain **modular**.

It does not provide a finished coordinate system.

It provides an architecture within which it can be tested which variables are in fact independently relevant.

11.5 The Difficulty of Measuring "Structural Distance"

A particularly demanding problem lies in the operationalisation of structural distance.

It would be too simple merely to ask people:

How different do you feel from other people?

Such a question measures subjective foreignness, not necessarily structural non-coincidence.

Nor is it sufficient to count differences in behaviour.

A genuine measure would have to reconstruct and compare different relevance orders.

It could investigate:

What is perceived spontaneously?

What has to be actively reconstructed?

Which information appears self-evident?

Which temporality is expected?

Which social meaning is automatically attributed?

Which attention has to be redirected?

Which form of coherence is preferred?

Only from such patterns of difference could an approximation of structural distance emerge.

Research would therefore be methodologically more demanding than conventional masking self-report.

But this effort would be precisely the price of not once again confusing outcome and cause.

11.6 Structural Distance Is Not Social Difficulty

Another important point concerns the evaluation of high distance.

Great structural distance does not necessarily have to be problematic.

Two people can possess very different world-bindings and develop a productive relationship precisely from this.

Art, science, intimate relationships, or intercultural encounters can benefit from difference.

The General Theory already points out that the problem does not lie in difference itself, but in how morphogenetic pressure is distributed. Where different relevance orders can coexist, difference can become productive; where one order universalises its own blind spots, the costs of translation increase.

A spatial theory must therefore not inadvertently generate another distance model of pathology.

High distance is not the same as high dysfunction.

This is precisely why the axes of asymmetry and viability are necessary.

11.7 Power Cannot Be Fully Geometrised

Social relations of power likewise cannot be fully reduced to spatial distance.

A minority and a majority order can be structurally relatively similar and nevertheless stand in an extremely asymmetrical power relation.

Conversely, highly different groups may possess comparable institutional power.

Raster Power therefore concerns not only the distance between relevance orders, but also resources, legal orders, institutional authority, economic dependencies, and the capacity to enforce one's own interpretation as binding.

The 3D model can partly represent these factors through the asymmetry axis.

It should not, however, claim thereby to provide a complete theory of social power.

The geometry describes the **distribution of relational compatibility work**.

It does not replace a comprehensive political economy, sociology, or institutional theory.

11.8 The Danger of a New Measurement of Neurodivergent People

A further limitation is politically particularly relevant.

A new multidimensional model could paradoxically itself become a new raster.

What initially serves to make visible the limits of one-dimensional masking scales could later once again be standardised:

How incommensurable are you?

How great is your field depth?

How high is your structural distance?

The theory could thereby reproduce precisely the logic it criticises.

The problem would become particularly clear if neurodivergent people were once again measured in isolation while the dominant environment remained unmeasured.

A relational instrument would therefore fundamentally have to capture **both sides or the entire field**.

Not:

How incompatible is the autistic person?

But:

What difference arises between this person and this concrete environment?

Not:

How much adaptation does the person need?

But:

How is compatibility work distributed?

This is both a methodological and an ethical limit of the model.

11.9 The Model Must Not Replace Lived Experience

A more complex theory does not automatically possess epistemic priority over the experience of neurodivergent people.

If a person says:

"For me, masking really does feel like hiding,"

a relational theory must not respond:

"No, in reality it is morphogenetic translation work."

Both can be true at the same time.

"Hiding" describes the experienced form of a concrete situation.

The field model attempts to analyse the structural conditions of this experience.

Likewise, a person may experience authentic unmasking.

The theory does not have to declare this experience false. It merely separates the phenomenological statement from the further ontological claim that an original state has thereby been uncovered.

This distinction is important.

The model is intended to **expand subjective experience, not dispossess it**.

11.10 Culture and History of the Masking Field

Social rasters are also historically and culturally variable.

What possesses high social legibility in one society may have little significance in another.

Communication norms change.

Forms of work change.

Gender roles change.

Digital communication changes social synchronisation.

Ideas of autism and neurodivergence also change the field itself.

Structural distance is therefore not a constant biological quantity.

It arises from the relation between person, culture, institution, and historical situation.

This opens important comparative research questions.

Do autistic people mask in the same way across different cultures?

Does more explicit communication change the field structure?

What effects do digital spaces have?

What effects do neurodivergent subcultures have?

Do lower structural distances emerge there, or merely different rasters?

How does masking change across historical generations?

A spatial model could capture such differences better than a conception of universal masking strategies.

11.11 Development and the Life Course

A further open question concerns development across the lifespan.

Masking is often understood as a learned response to social sanction. Earlier works in the present theoretical corpus have, however, proposed a stronger hypothesis: certain forms of regulative form-building may already occur prior to conscious social adaptation and therefore cannot be fully explained as strategic camouflage.

This hypothesis would be highly relevant to the field model.

If incommensurability-induced form-building occurs early, its developmental structure would have to differ from later acquired stigma-induced or strategic masking.

Several levels could thereby be distinguished:

early sensory or regulative form-building,

later learning of social compatibility,

conscious stigma management,

institutional adaptation,

and identity-related forms of masking or unmasking.

Such a developmental analysis could prevent all later observable forms from being subsumed under a single psychological explanation.

11.12 Masking as a Process Rather Than a State

Longitudinal research is likely to be particularly important.

The field model suggests that masking is not a stable personality score.

People move through different fields.

They learn.

Institutions change.

Relationships emerge and break apart.

Compatibility work becomes automated.

Burnout changes available resources.

New social concepts change self-interpretations.

The relevant unit is therefore not only the field position, but the **trajectory through the field**.

Future research should therefore ask less:

How high is your masking?

and more:

How has your field position changed over time?

When did the costs increase?

When did asymmetry decrease?

Which contexts enabled high viability?

Which transitions led to breakdown or relief?

Especially in neurodivergent biographies, such a perspective could explain why the same person displays entirely different degrees of visible disability, adaptability, and burden across different phases of life.

11.13 A Research Programme Rather Than a Completed Theory

These limitations do not constitute an argument against the model.

On the contrary: they determine its appropriate scientific function.

The spatial theory of masking should initially be understood as a **research programme**.

It proposes systematically bringing together several questions that have so far been separated:

How do the generators of masking differ?

How great is the structural distance between relevance orders?

How deeply does the necessary translation intervene in world-organisation?

Who carries this work?

For how long and across how many fields must it be performed?

What happens to the viability of one's own world-binding?

And how does this constellation change when the environment changes?

These questions are not already answered by the theory.

The theory first makes them visible within their **shared architecture**.

Precisely therein lies its possible scientific value.

The General Theory (Speed 2026d) expanded masking from a neurodivergent special phenomenon into a general problem of competing relevance orders.

The field model developed here does not simply continue this movement toward ever greater generality.

It performs the reverse movement:

from the general mechanism back to the structural difference of its concrete forms.

This could enable neurodivergent masking in particular to be described more precisely without either universalising it or once again isolating it as an individual deficit.

The theory therefore does not claim:

This is what neurodivergence is.

It asks a different question:

Which geometries of social reality might explain why certain neurodivergent forms of masking emerge—and how can we make these geometries empirically visible?

12. Conclusion: From the Psychology of the Mask to the Geometry of the Relation

Masking is frequently treated in neurodivergence research as an individual phenomenon of adaptation. The focus lies on camouflaging, behavioural control, social compensation, exhaustion, identity conflicts, and burnout. These perspectives capture important experiences, but remain limited where they make the person the primary site of the problem.

The present paper has proposed a different perspective.

Masking has been modelled as a **spatial-relational field phenomenon**.

The central question is therefore no longer exclusively:

What does a person do when they mask?

But:

Within which structural constellation does this masking work become necessary?

The starting point of this shift is the previously developed general theory of masking. There, masking arises when different relevance orders must be stabilised simultaneously. It therefore designates neither exclusively deception nor mere adaptation, but the operative handling of partially incompatible forms of world-binding.

The present model has spatially differentiated this general structure.

Three main dimensions have been proposed:

structural distance,

asymmetry of compatibility work, and

operative viability.

These three dimensions make it possible to distinguish masking constellations that may appear similar on one-dimensional scales.

A person may mask intensively even though they fundamentally share the dominant social order and primarily alter their behaviour strategically.

Another person may show only slight visible behavioural change and nevertheless have to translate several levels of their perceptual, attentional, and meaning organisation in parallel.

This makes clear:

The intensity of the mask is not identical with the depth of the relation from which it arises.

12.1 From Masking Intensity to Masking Geometry

The decisive theoretical shift of this paper therefore lies in the distinction between **masking intensity** and **masking geometry**.

Masking intensity describes how strongly a person regulates, changes, or conceals behaviour.

Masking geometry describes the relational structure that makes this operation necessary.

It asks:

How great is the non-coincidence between the relevance orders involved?

How deeply does the necessary mediation reach into one's own world-organisation?

How one-sidedly is compatibility work distributed?

How persistent is the field?

And can one's own world-binding remain operatively viable within this field?

A high masking score thereby acquires a different meaning.

It is no longer automatically a measure of how far a person has moved away from an authentic self.

It can be an expression of a particular **field position**.

12.2 Why Neurodivergence Nevertheless Remains Particular

The generalisation of the concept of masking does not therefore lead to the claim that neurodivergent masking is merely a variant of what everyone does anyway.

The General Theory instead shows that the basic mechanism extends beyond neurodivergence: artists, scientists, people living in poverty, employees, or marginalised groups can likewise translate between competing relevance orders.

The new field model, however, makes the necessary redifferentiation possible.

Not every form of masking has the same generator.

Not every form of masking has the same field depth.

Not every form of masking arises at the same structural distance.

And not everyone has to perform the same forms of translation work across the same number of areas of life simultaneously.

For certain neurodivergent profiles, the hypothesis is therefore proposed that particularly high masking burden may be associated with a combination of **greater structural distance, high field depth, persistent multiple demands, and asymmetrical distribution of compatibility work**.

This hypothesis is explicitly not a universalist claim about neurodivergence.

Incommensurability has not been asserted in this paper as an established property of autistic or neurodivergent people.

It has been introduced as a **theoretical variable**.

Precisely for this reason, it can be empirically tested whether certain neurodivergent profiles in fact occur more frequently within relations in which communication and social agency are not merely learned, but must be continuously mediated between partially non-coinciding relevance orders.

12.3 Exhaustion Is an Outcome, Not an Essence

One of the most important consequences concerns the status of exhaustion.

High exhaustion can be real, severe, and clinically relevant.

But it does not define what masking is.

The general theory had already pointed out that adaptation can become partially automated while the simultaneous stabilisation of incompatible relevance systems persists.

It follows that:

Exhaustion measures the costs of an operation. It does not identify the structure of that operation. Nor do the costs alone tell us anything definitive about the extent, depth, or dimension of the respective masking.

It follows that autism cannot be inferred from the costs of masking alone. What would instead be decisive is the spatial formation within which masking arises: the distribution of structural distance, asymmetry, viability, field depth, and persistence. Precisely this geometry could make autistic structure recognisable as a kind of negative form even where the visible costs are low, automated, or situationally barely noticeable.

The profile therefore lies not primarily in the level of energy loss, but in the specific configuration of the field. Otherwise, the mistaken assumption could easily arise that autistic people do not mask among other autistic people, or that no masking is present when such situations feel subjectively little or not at all exhausting. Low exhaustion may, however, equally indicate high reciprocity, greater viability, automation, or lower structural distance, without all masking operations necessarily having disappeared.

This distinction prevents two errors.

First, particularly exhausting masking must not automatically be interpreted as particularly neurodivergent.

Second, relatively non-exhausting or highly automated masking must not automatically count as evidence against structural neurodivergence.

This also makes productive or transformative masking visible again.

Masking does not necessarily have to mean self-loss. Under resonant conditions, mediation can generate new forms and extend one's own world-binding rather than merely suppressing it. Earlier works have described precisely this possibility as creative world-mediation.

12.4 The End of the Simple Masking/Unmasking Dichotomy

The meaning of unmasking changes as well.

If masking emerges from a field relation, unmasking cannot simply be understood as movement from a false state into a true one.

The General Theory had already argued that neither masking nor complete unmasking eliminates the competing relevance orders themselves.

The spatial model specifies this insight.

A person may be less exhausted after unmasking without structural distance having disappeared.

Asymmetry may have decreased.

The environment may take over more translation work.

The person may receive more Eigenzeit.

Operative viability may increase.

Unmasking can therefore be understood as a **field shift**.

This does not devalue unmasking.

It explains its effectiveness without the additional assumption that an unchanged original self had been hidden beneath every mask.

The decisive distinction is:

Relief is empirically experienceable. Originality is a further ontological interpretation.

12.5 The Actual Counterpart to Harmful Masking

From this perspective, the opposite of harmful masking is not necessarily non-masking.

The actual counterpart would be a relation in which compatibility does not have to be permanently produced through one-sided self-transformation.

The political objective therefore also shifts from abolishing masking in order to make everyone authentic toward creating **fields in which different world-bindings can persist without one side permanently bearing the costs of their non-coincidence**.

The General Theory describes this political perspective as **Raster Justice** or ontological coexistence. Different rasters are not supposed to become identical to one another, but to be able to coexist without continuously transforming their differences into deficits.

The spatial model turns this into a geometrical question:

How can asymmetry be reduced?

How can viability be increased?

Where can transitional spaces emerge?

Where can compatibility work be shared?

12.6 From Adaptation to Co-Formation and Ultimately to Ontological Coexistence

The most productive limit case would not be complete separation, but **co-formation**.

Two different world-bindings encounter one another and generate a form that was not fully predetermined by either of them.

Not:

A adapts to B.

Not:

B tolerates A.

But:

A + B → C

Such a third space does not eliminate difference.

It makes it productive.

The field model thereby returns to an older foundational idea: masking can be more than concealment. It can be a process of relational form-building.

The difference between productive and destructive masking would then not lie in whether a mask exists.

It would lie in **who is allowed to determine the form and which world-bindings can continue to live through it**.

12.7 A Different Understanding of High Neurodivergent Masking Scores

The perhaps most immediate result of the model therefore concerns the initial question:

Why do neurodivergent people so frequently report strong masking?

A psychological answer is:

Because they have to try harder to appear neurotypical.

A field-theoretical answer would be more complex:

Because certain neurodivergent people may operate more frequently, more deeply, and more persistently within social spaces in which their own relevance orders only partially overlap with dominant rasters and in which the production of compatibility is predominantly assigned to them.

This is not a statement about lower social ability.

On the contrary.

High masking competence may indicate that a person performs extraordinarily complex boundary work.

The dominant environment often sees only the result.

It sees a conversation.

Not the translation.

It sees eye contact.

Not the parallel processing.

It sees occupational functioning.

Not the stabilisation of competing Eigenzeiten.

It sees social competence.

Not the geometry that makes this competence necessary.

12.8 The Possible Paradigm Shift

The central theoretical shift of this paper can therefore be summarised in three steps.

The classical question is:

How strongly does the person mask?

The General Theory shifts it to:

Which competing relevance orders make masking necessary?

The spatial model finally asks:

What geometry do these competing orders possess, and where is the person located within this field?

This final step could be decisive for masking research.

For as long as masking is sought exclusively within the person, high masking scores inevitably appear as properties of that person.

Once the relation itself becomes the object of investigation, it can become visible that part of what is measured as individual burden represents **the costs of a social architecture**.

12.9 Closing Formula

Masking is then neither merely a mask nor merely adaptation.

It is the work that arises where different forms of world must simultaneously remain real.

Neurodivergent masking may represent a particular case of this work where differences in perception, attention, temporality, and meaning-making require particularly deep or persistent mediation.

Whether and for which neurodivergent profiles this applies remains to be tested empirically.

Precisely for this reason, research needs a model capable of making this possibility visible in the first place.

The central question at the end is therefore no longer what the neurodivergent person hides behind their mask, but rather within what space they move, which worlds they must simultaneously stabilise there, and why the work of keeping these worlds compatible is assigned precisely to them.

This would mark the transition from a **psychology of the mask** to a **geometry of the relation**.

Declaration of AI usage

Generative AI tools were partly used during manuscript preparation to support language editing, structural refinement, translation, critical review, and the clarification of formulations. Their use forms part of a broader method of Interface Text, in which generative AI can function as a mediating and transformative interface between differently organized linguistic, cognitive, and epistemic forms. This is of particular relevance to neurodivergent authorship, where the communicative surface of a text may require translation into dominant academic or linguistic conventions without replacing the underlying epistemic structure.

The research, empirical material, theoretical concepts, interpretations, and scholarly conclusions remain those of the author. AI-assisted material was critically reviewed, revised where necessary, and integrated only where it remained consistent with the author's formative logic and conceptual framework. The author assumes full responsibility for the final manuscript.

For the methodological and theoretical context of this use of generative AI, including the concepts of Interface Text, neurodivergent authorship, recursive transformation, and authorship as an Eigenzeit-relation, see: Timothy Speed, "Communicating with the Unfamiliar and the Incommensurable: Generative AI, Neurodivergent Authorship, and the Transformation of Epistemic Form" (2026), DOI: *https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.22810346*

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